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THE
STORY OF ISABEL;

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“ THE FAVOURITE OF NATURE,”

&c. &c. &c.

Mary Ann Kelly

Thou say'st I preach, Lorenzo !—'tis confest.

YOUNG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.

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LONDON:

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TO
MRS. MURRAY,
OF POLMAISE,

IN TESTIMONY OF GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE,

AND AS A TOKEN OF SINCERE REGARD,

These Volumes

ARE INSCRIBED,

BY

HER OBLIGED AND AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

I AM aware it is the opinion of many persons, that a work of fiction ought not to be made the vehicle for conveying religious sentiments. I could appeal to the highest Scriptural authority as sanctioning my belief, that the moral feelings are often the most successfully approached through the medium of the imagination ; but it might seem irreverent, and, to avoid the possibility of being mistaken, I forbear to do so.

That there are thousands of persons in the world whose minds are only accessible on the side of their fancy, and who turn with distaste from the voice of instruction, except when it steals upon them unawares, is a fact which, I should suppose, would be generally allowed.

If, indeed, these unhappy persons are not worthy of any consideration, I have spent my

strength for nought. But I am willing to believe, that amongst them many are to be found, who, in the following history, will trace a similitude of error and suffering which may prompt a solemn thought, that works more professedly serious have failed to excite.

If such be the case, I can well submit to the criticisms of the more numerous party, who, I am prepared to find condemning the whole as mere cant, and (in the slang of the day) altogether humbug. To please that class of readers never entered into my plan, and certainly forms no part of my ambition. My first desire is to be in the right: that I do not err in believing true happiness, even in this world, to consist in the pursuit of religion as the predominant and influencing principle of thought and action, is my settled and immovable conviction. I do not pretend to affirm, that the method I have taken of imparting that conviction to others is the best method I could have chosen; but it appeared to me one which was likely to prevail with

many, at least so far as to incline them to *think*; and, to induce a reader to think, more especially to think of the things which pertain to peace in this life, and immortal happiness in the next, being the only result to which, as a writer, I direct my aim, I feel no hesitation in believing, that, even upon this humble production, the Divine blessing may be safely asked and expected.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

I HAVE observed in others, and experienced in myself, the truth of Addison's remark at the commencement of the Spectator, "that no persons feel much interest in a book till they know by what sort of being it was written."

When I acknowledge myself to be a spinster above fifty years of age, I will also add, that it is not my own story I am about to relate—which it will be desirable, as speedily as possible, to make known, in order to prevent the reader from laying down the book at once, in the certainty that nothing can be told of an old maid that is worth attending to. But my history being in some measure connected with that which is contained in these pages, I am compelled to say something about myself; but I will be as brief as possible.

I was about forty when I was left, by the death of my mother, to decide upon my future plans. My income was very small, my connections few in the place where I had hitherto

resided, and, upon the whole, I was advised to remove to the town of D——, where I had some distant relations of the name of Russell.

The Russells, however, would not have proved any inducement to tempt me there, if other circumstances had not combined to make me contemplate it as the place best adapted for me. Accordingly I removed there.

My habits were all of a quiet kind. I had little or no intercourse with the world, commonly so called; my religious opinions did not permit of it—for I was of what is considered the evangelical party; that is, I had been used to study religion as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and to make it as such the guide of my life. My name is Mary Delmond;—and this I think is all I need say by way of introducing myself to the reader's notice.

When I first came to D——, I found my cousin Elizabeth Russell in habits of intimacy with a young lady, who, without distinguishing me by any particular marks of notice, attracted my affection and interest in a high degree. Isabel Melville (which was the name of this young lady) was a person whom it was impossible to behold with indifference. It was very probable that you might not like her; for there was often an air of carelessness in her demean-

nour which the generality of persons mistook for disregard or contempt, but which upon a nearer view I detected to be the result of a weariness of heart—a dissatisfaction with the common routine of life and its vapid occupations, which nothing but experience could have produced : and experience in one so young I could scarcely believe to have yet been very strong. I was not a person to obtrude myself upon the notice of others, for I was of a reserved character ; but in the course of her frequent visits at Mrs. Russell's, at whose house I was often a guest, I did endeavour to obtain an intimacy with her, for I thought I knew better than she did herself the cause of her complaints of the uncertainty of human pleasures, and of the small inducement this world offered to stimulate a wish to continue in it. I saw that she had no religious principles : with a mind of strong powers, and a heart of intense passions, which more especially required the safeguard and counteraction of sound religion, she evidently knew nothing about it.

I was so happy as eventually to succeed in my desire of obtaining a place in her friendship. In her latter years I was her companion—her only confidante : she left to my disposal

all her papers, which consisted chiefly of memoranda of the principal events of her life.

From these MSS. I have selected the following sheets, and have interspersed them here and there with such remarks of my own, as were necessary to explain where, for the sake of brevity, I have abridged her narration.

THE
NARRATIVE
OF
ISABEL MELVILLE.

CHAPTER I.

'Tis granted, and no plainer truth appears,
Our most important are our earliest years :
The mind, impressible and soft, with ease
Imbibes and copies what she hears and sees ;
And, through life's labyrinth, holds fast the clue
That Education gives her, false or true.

COWPER.

My father, who was the younger son of a good family, eloped, in his nineteenth year, with a young lady from boarding-school ; by which measure he disobliged all his friends, got himself disinherited, and, in one word, ruined his fortune for life. This, indeed, was but for a short period. Very soon after

his imprudent marriage, the regiment in which he held an ensign's commission was ordered upon foreign service, and he was obliged to leave his young wife in the most distressing circumstances.

Without more than the means of a bare maintenance, and within a few months of her confinement, this parting was to her a source of indescribable wretchedness. She was an orphan, and had no friend to look up to in her severe trial. In these circumstances, she found an invaluable one in my father's eldest brother—one of the kindest, the most amiable of men. He was the eldest of my grandfather's first family; for he had been twice married: of a number of children, none but these two sons survived. My uncle being the eldest of the first, and my father the youngest of the second family, there was a sufficient disparity in their years to make him regard the latter in the light of a son rather than a brother.

He endeavoured to intercede with his father in his behalf; and, finding it in vain, he resolved to befriend, as far as possible, the hapless partner of his brother's errors in her distressing situation.

He provided for her comfort in her approaching confinement; and, when it pleased Providence that the event should be fatal to her, he took me into his own house, with a determination to adopt me as his own child. My father returned no more from the Continent: he was cut off, in the field of battle, while I was yet too young to know his loss. I was thus cast entirely upon the protection of my uncle, who, upon the event of his father's death, finding himself in the possession of an ample fortune, married a very amiable lady, to whom he had long been attached, and thus bestowed upon me another invaluable friend.

With this uncle and aunt I resided at the large and populous town of D——.

I recollect but little of my early years, and what I can recall of them, it would not be to my advantage to relate. I know that, at a very early period, I betrayed such a high spirit, such a proud and impatient temper, and such a determined will, that, neither my aunt nor the governess being able to manage me, I was at length despatched to school; where I acquired some accomplishments and some knowledge, but not the power of self-control, of which I stood in very great need.

My aunt, who had no children of her own, loved me as tenderly as if she had been my mother—a love which was very sincerely returned on my part. As I had never known any other protection, and had lived with them from my infant years, I looked up to her and my uncle with the same feelings of reverence and attachment with which I should have regarded my real parents. It would have been strange, indeed, if I had not; for

never did parental affection manifest itself in more continued acts of kindness and love, than those which testified their regard for me. They only loved me too much. It would have been far more for my happiness to have lived with those who were less tender and solicitous to please me. My temper and will required to be dealt with sternly ; but as yet I knew nothing of myself ; and, nobody indulging me so much as they did, it may be supposed what were my sensations, when my aunt, finding her health and spirits declining, requested my uncle to remove me from school, that she might have me for a constant companion.

“ I was now fifteen,” she said ; “ and though, to be sure, I was still very high-spirited, it was my nature so to be, and nothing could entirely subdue it ; I was a very sensible girl, and should see my faults, and gradually correct them ; and she must do the best she could with me,

if I should be refractory—a case she did not apprehend; I was past a baby; I knew right from wrong better than many persons twice my age. In short, Mr. Melville,” she continued, in answer to my dear uncle’s musing face and shaking head, “I must have her with me; for I cannot be happy without her.”

The result of the whole was that I returned home, so happy, that I can find no words to describe the transports that filled my heart. I was put in possession of a very pretty apartment adjoining my bed-room, where I was allowed to spend a great part of my time. I was permitted to continue the league of friendship into which I had entered with Elizabeth Russell, a schoolfellow, who returned home at the same time I did, and who also resided at D——. I had a vast deal more money allowed me than it was quite proper I should spend: in short, I had every possible indulgence that could add to the happiness of early

years—those enchanting years, which are in themselves so delightful as to ask little else to increase their power to charm.

But, perfect as I had imagined my felicity, I soon found it had its alloy. I should rather say, I soon discovered that I had within me the alloy, which mixed with every source of comfort, and which embittered every period of my existence.

Something more than I possessed was always what I sought : a restless principle of incessant activity doomed me to perpetual disquiet. Novelty lost its charms ; fresh excitement was requisite. It was found : but, alas ! it became familiar, and then tasteless ; and thus, even at the age of fifteen, I began to think that life was not altogether the Elysian scene which, when I was released from the detested discipline of the boarding-school, and installed in the comforts and unbounded indulgence of

my uncle's house, I supposed I should find it.

While there was a work of imagination unread in the house, I had within my reach a store of unspeakable felicity; for I existed only in the regions of fancy. I was a visionary from my cradle. I can truly say, in the words of Macbeth, that, for many years of my life, with me "nothing was, but what was not." I soon exhausted all those stores of literature—at least such of them as I could prevail upon myself to read—and my afflictions were getting very heavy indeed; for I had no solace for a detestable volume of *Telemachus*, of which my aunt required me daily to make a translation. She endeavoured to keep up as many of my school habits as she found it practicable to enforce; but these, indeed, were but few; for *she* also found, to her disappointment, that, in removing me from school at so early a period, she had augured rather too fa-

vourably of my docility in yielding my will to her's. She often talked to me very seriously about my inattention to my studies, and so did my uncle; and for a time I was affected by what they said—though even from them, whom I loved better than any other persons, I could not well brook any sort of opposition. I did not, indeed, manifest my dislike of their reproof by any disrespectful replies; but the weariness and wretchedness with which I listened, too plainly evinced how ill I appreciated the value of correction. When the impression was worn off, I returned to my usual habits, without intending to slight their advice, and only because I could not practise the discipline requisite to reform them.

I could not endure trouble of any kind: I could not bear translating, or practising, or studying history, or any thing that was not amusing.

But, in defiance of my indolence, my

mind contrived to run out into something extraordinary. Whatever I liked to do, I could do well. Music I was passionately fond of. My uncle was a good judge of music, and was in habits of acquaintance with many very eminent performers. Hence I picked up, incidentally and without trouble, just as many hints and ideas as, assisted by my own taste, rendered me no common proficient. It was chiefly in vocal music that I exercised myself: first, because I had a good voice; and, secondly, because it did not require so much labour as it would have done to become a fine instrumental performer.

I had endeavoured to read and understand French as well as English; for I could not meet with English translations of the novels and romances which I found in my uncle's library, and which I devoured with an insatiable appetite.

Drawing or painting I never could make any thing of; and, except two

transparencies, which decorated the hall-windows on an illumination-night, and which I executed in one morning, I had nothing to produce as a testimony of my having been under the drawing-master's hands. These works of art, I believe, never would have been accomplished, if my dear uncle had not brought the tears into my eyes, by giving me at breakfast a gentle reprimand for my utter indifference to the accomplishments he had endeavoured to bestow upon me.

“ Now, there's Elizabeth Russell,” said he, in his simple, quiet way, “ her father tells me she has painted fifteen views of the country round D——; and really, Isabel, it would be just as well if you did something of the kind, instead of wasting your time in reading so many novels.”

Fortunately there was, on that very evening, upon some account or another, to be an illumination; and I knew of nothing so likely to gratify my uncle as

to produce a picture upon the occasion. I held a council with Miss Russell ; and, together, we concocted a raging eruption of Vesuvius, and a very white moonlight scene, both of which looked exceedingly well with candles shining through them. My uncle was thus made happy ; and my aunt kissed me, and said, “ nobody could be a better girl than I was when I liked.”

But, as I have remarked, I was, upon the whole, not happy ; for I had some pages of *Telemachus* to translate every day, and I had read the greater part of all the novels in the house ; and what would have become of me, in such desperate circumstances, I know not, if I had not accidentally taken down a volume of “ *Sir Charles Grandison*.” All Richardson’s novels I had hitherto avoided, because they were so terribly long. The immense space they occupied on the book-shelves frightened me very much ; and a page or two, on which I had

opened in “Clarissa Harlowe,” where she seemed to be moralizing, had alarmed me still more; and, therefore, I would have nothing at all to say to them.

But, in mere despair, I one afternoon took down, at random, the third volume of “Sir Charles Grandison.” I happened to open it at the precise part where he retires with Miss Byron into Lord L——’s library, for the purpose of communicating to her his history.

As if it were but a yesterday’s remembrance, I can recall the whole circumstance. I began to read, standing at the place where I had taken down the book, because it was only as an experiment that I ventured upon it. I scarcely hoped to find in it any thing that was amusing or interesting enough to tempt me to proceed. But gradually I became pleased, delighted, affected, charmed. I sat down upon the library-steps. I remained there till I had finished that volume; and there I was found by

my aunt, with my head leaning on my hand, wrapt up in visions about Sir Charles and Clementina, and Miss Byron and Dr. Bartlett, and all the delightful people with whom I had formed the most enchanting intimacy, and the prospect of returning to whom, the moment I had drank my tea, alone made me obedient to my aunt's summons.

CHAP. II.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

Oh, happiness! our being's end and aim—
 Good, pleasure, ease, content—whate'er thy name;
 That something still, which prompts th' eternal sigh,
 For which we bear to live, or dare to die;
 Which still so near us, yet beyond us lies,
 O'erlook'd, seen double by the fool and wise.

POPE.

THUS, feeding the fever of my imagination, I generally contrived to throw over life an illusive charm. When, indeed, reality presented itself, and I was compelled to look upon the face of rugged truth, I was, as might be expected, disgusted with the sight.

Sometimes in extacies, and sometimes in the depth of wretchedness—but never in that sober medium of tranquillity which appears to be the best felicity that life affords, I arrived at my nine-

teenth year. Then an event occurred, which gave a more decided turn to my character and my destiny ; and which, affording occupation to all the faculties of my mind and the affections of my heart, imparted for a time a new and exquisite source of the happiness I had hitherto so eagerly but so vainly sought.

It was a mutual attachment which occurred between me and a gentleman of the name of Leslie, who came to D—— to study with a clergyman there, who was in the habit of finishing the education of young men. Mr. Leslie had been at the University, but had left it in disgust, in consequence of some transaction in which he appeared not to have been well used ; and, in the interim of his coming of age, of which he wanted but a few months, he spent his time with Mr. Hodson, the clergyman above mentioned. Some mystery hung over his situation, which he could not explain to me ; but I loved him too well

to act the wiser part of declining his addresses till he was able publicly to avow his attachment. I was too happy in his affection to forbid his acknowledging it till it could be imparted to my aunt and uncle. I was accustomed to obey no counsellor but my own headstrong will ; and that I followed in this, as in most instances, to the destruction rather than to the fulfilment of the happiness it promised me. Private as we wished to keep it, my uncle and aunt perceived our attachment ; and not hearing, either from Leslie or me, that it was sanctioned by any declaration on his side, they disapproved of it, and finally forbid him the house. Such measures produced no other effect upon me than to make me still more determined to remain faithful to him. But I did not act in opposition to these kind and dear benefactors without experiencing pangs of remorse, which even yet wring my bosom with indescribable anguish, when

I think of the sorrow I brought upon them, and the misery with which, almost to the end of my life, I overwhelmed myself. I can say with truth, that, even in the very act of following my own inclinations, I found punishment. My meetings with Leslie were seldom pleasurable. I loved him, indeed, as such a heart as mine might be expected to love, when, for the first time, it bestows its young and impassioned affections. But I was dissatisfied with the mystery that enveloped him. I had scarcely patience to wait till the appointed period of his coming of age, when he promised to be candid with me. He was of a proud, independent spirit, as well as me; and thus we more often met to dispute than to be happy. But they were the quarrels of lovers—for such we truly were to each other; and, in spite of all the sorrow he occasioned me, I existed only in his presence.

The time for his coming of age ap-

proached—that time to which I looked forward as the crisis of my fate. Previous to it, he told me he must go to London for three weeks; and the afternoon before he went we met to take leave. We generally walked in company with Miss Russell, through whose means our communication with each other was greatly facilitated; but upon this occasion we were alone.

We parted in mutual good-humour, and with much pleasure in the prospect of meeting again, and I returned home unusually happy. On arriving there, I was greeted with the information that my uncle desired to see me in the dining-room. Though I could not conjecture any possibility of his knowing that I had been in the company of Leslie, still my conscience told me, that reproof upon that subject awaited me, and such turned out to be the case. He had, unperceived by either Leslie or me, observed us at a distance while he was taking his after-

noon's walk. My aunt was with him when I entered the room—they were sitting at the tea-table, and in default of my being there to officiate in its duties, as I generally did, my aunt was presiding at it. This was in itself a tacit reproof, but a more direct one awaited me.

“Isabel,” said my uncle, “you have been walking with Mr. Leslie!”

As I could not contradict, and did not chuse to acknowledge it, I was silent, though far enough from submission.

“I have hitherto,” he continued, “addressed you in the way of expostulation on this subject; for I had that opinion both of your head and your heart, which inclined me to believe that it would suffice; but I begin to fear, Isabel, that you have not the grateful sense of my regard and attention to you, which, considering all things, I think you ought to have.”

My heart was deeply touched with this appeal; but pride, the strongest of my passions, was too much wounded, even by

the gentle manner in which he had hinted at my obligations to him, to admit of my making any proper reply.

He mistook my silence for the effect of sullen resentment, and he proceeded in a higher tone—

“Perhaps I did not act wisely in taking upon myself the guardianship of one, whose high and ungovernable temper is likely, I fear, to occasion me trouble enough!” and he sighed deeply; “nevertheless, as I have invested myself with the office of your protector, I shall fulfil, as far as I can, its duties. I once more repeat, that I command you to break off all intercourse with Mr. Leslie. If you possessed any proper feelings of delicacy and respect for yourself, you could not condescend to accept the attentions of any man, while they are tendered to you in such an ambiguous and disreputable manner.”

“Disreputable!” I repeated, with great indignation.

“Yes, disreputable,” he said: “is it not disreputable to meet in a clandestine manner any man, who has the power to solicit your notice openly and in the face of the whole world?”

“Perhaps he has not this power,” I was on the point of saying; but I restrained myself, not from any prudential motive of avoiding inquiries that I might not well be able to answer, but because I scorned the insinuations which were levelled against both me and Leslie.

“In short, Isabel,” he added, “let us understand one another: I have loved you as well as if you had been my own child—I do still love you. I have been a friend and a father to you, when, but for me, you would have been a beggar! I have a right to your obedience, and I will have it—I will, or else we must part.”

I never saw my uncle so angry before; in general he was the gentlest of human beings; but when disturbed he was exceedingly peremptory. His anger aug-

mented my disdain of reproof. His address to me I thought unkind in the extreme ; and had I attempted to answer it, I knew that the violence of my spirit would have urged me to the most unbecoming expressions. To save myself from this error, and from the remorse which would have followed it, (for I dearly loved my uncle,) I ran out of the room. As soon as I had reached my own, I locked and barred the door, and gave vent to the storm that raged within me. While in this distracted state, I heard a gentle knock at my door ; I knew that it was my dear aunt come to talk with me in her gentle persuasive manner ; but I was yet too much under the dominion of my proud rebellious feelings to render the present a successful moment for her to address me. I could have been glad to have excused myself from admitting her ; but that was impossible, and I slowly and reluctantly opened the door. She shook her head as she

looked at my countenance, swelled with weeping.

“ Now, why is this, Isabel ? ” she said.

“ Why is it ! ” I replied, with a fresh burst of passion : “ is it not enough that my uncle is not contented to reprove me for my faults, mildly and reasonably, but that he should reproach me with the misfortunes of my poverty and my friendlessness ! ”

“ Hush, hush ! ” she said ; “ you are so impetuous—so impatient—so unreasonable ! ”

“ I am every thing that is bad—no doubt that I am every thing that is bad ! ”

She sat down upon a chair near me ; and without addressing me, she leaned her head upon her hand and seemed to think aloud.

“ What is it that we wish for—what is it that we wish for ? ” she said, “ when we ask for children ! This ought to teach me how mercifully my prayers have been denied ; for had I a daughter to inflict

as much pain upon me, Isabel, as you do now, what would be my case? and perhaps it might have been so; but, still, you have been to us both as a daughter, and this is our requital!"

"I cannot bear this!" I exclaimed, in a fresh paroxysm of emotion; "I cannot bear it!—Do not think me disrespectful if I intreat you to leave me a while to myself; I know that I shall say what I shall deeply repent of—I am not myself, I beseech you to leave me!"

"If I could leave you to something better than your own heart at this unhappy moment," she said, rising slowly, and with evident unwillingness; "but I fear I give you up to your most bitter enemy!"

"Pray—pray leave me," I said; and in the energy of intreaty, I clasped her hand in mine.

She seemed unable to comprehend exactly the frame of my mind; but solitude appearing to be so ardently de-

sired, she, at length, though with a sigh that pierced my heart, withdrew. To what did she leave me?—to solitude? Ah, no! The goadings of my intense and various passions rendered my bosom a den of demons. I formed alternately the wildest schemes to free my uncle from the incumbrance of me, since such his words indicated that he began to consider me; at least, since such was the construction I put upon them.

“ Unless I can yield my actions, my pursuits, my very thoughts and affections to his will,” I said, “ I shall daily be subjected to tauntings and upbraidings, which I must meekly yield to, because I am clothed and kept from starving by his bounty. And have I no talents, no abilities, no means of procuring a subsistence for myself? Surely I have, and I will exert them; I will go out in some situation that may enable me to earn the bread, that is not to be given me without a subjugation of soul

too contemptible to be endured." Such were the first ebullitions of my anger ; but soon came softer emotions, which brought with them such tender proofs of my dear uncle's love and care for me, as turned the current of my fury against myself, as one of the most ungrateful of created beings. Tears of a more soothing kind now drowned my cheeks. I could have been glad to have cast myself at his feet, and promised both him and my aunt unlimited obedience. But to give up Leslie ! " Oh ! any thing but that !" I said, aloud.— I cannot part with Leslie ! But I need not ; I need not. He will return and acknowledge his love to me ; all will be avowed. My uncle will be satisfied of his honourable intentions, and I may yet be happy. Oh ! surely I may yet be happy !

I felt that it was but a doubtful anticipation : I felt that I was withholding

the only sacrifice my uncle asked of me, in testimony of my obedience to his wishes ; the only sacrifice I was called upon to make : a sacrifice that delicacy to myself, as well as compliance with his will, demanded to be made. But it was in opposition to my inclinations, and I could not attempt to give myself the pain of crossing them. I could not, therefore, return to him, and promise compliance with his wishes ; a measure which, at this time, would alone have made my presence agreeable to him.

I remained up-stairs for the rest of the evening. The following morning dawned upon me bringing with it no hope—no excitement. Leslie was gone : all was uncomfortable at home ; the whole creation was a blank to me. “ What a wretched thing is human life ! ” I thought ; nothing stable ! nothing solid ! We no sooner believe ourselves happy, than some blight falls

upon hope, and every thing is dreary and wintry desolation. How well has the poet said—

‘ When I consider life, ’tis all a cheat ;
 Yet fool’d by hope, men favour the deceit ;
 Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay ;
 To-morrow’s falser than the former day ;
 Lies more, and when it says we shall be blest
 With some new joys, cuts off what we possest.
 Strange cozenage ! none would live past years again,
 Yet all hope pleasure from what yet remain ;
 And from the dregs of life think to receive
 What the first sprightly runnings could not give :
 I’m tired of waiting for this chymic gold,
 Which fools us young, and beggars us when old.”

When I had given vent to some portion of my misery, by repeating these fine lines of Dryden, which Leslie, who complained of human life as much as I did, had taught me to admire, I felt more composed ; satisfied, I suppose, that as it was in days of yore, it must be now, and so on to the end of time. Still it occurred to me, that this never could be the meaning and design of human existence. So much beauty, and order,

and actual contrivance for the happiness of mere animal nature, pervaded the universe, that it was impossible for any mind, not perfectly stupid, to rest satisfied in a belief that human creatures were only called into being to be miserable. "But where is their happiness?"

I said. It cannot be found. I know by fatal experience, it cannot be found in the indulgence of feeling, and the gratification of will. I once thought that if Leslie loved me I should have nothing left to wish for; I know that he loves me, yet am I, upon the whole, happy: am I even as happy as I was when doubtful of his attachment? I could not say that I was; for before I knew him, though never to be called happy, because the restless ardour of my imagination precluded the tranquillity which alone deserves the denomination of happiness; I was still not tossed about on the waves of hope and fear; not agitated with suspense; not racked

with anxious doubts; not thus entirely the slave of feeling. “No,” I continued: “I never have known what happiness is; I cannot even guess where it is to be found: for who do I know that apparently possesses it?” And I ran over in my thoughts all my intimate connexions and friends. “My aunt and uncle: they were not happy!” and I sighed heavily as the conviction passed through my mind, that I was the principal, if not the only cause of their disquiet. Miss Russell! No: I could not admit her to be brought forward as an instance of happiness. She was in her heart quite as restless, quite as ungovernable as I was; but she had more skill in concealing her feelings. I have, in a more enlarged intercourse with society, seen many that resembled her; but at this time she was not quite well understood by me: for though I certainly had great facility in reading characters, at the period of which I speak,

I was very young, and not exempt from being imposed upon by those strong pretensions which many persons so resolutely make to every thing that is fine in sentiment, fine in conduct, and fine in character, that people are obliged to believe in their validity. In fact, these pretenders at last arrive at believing in them themselves; so true is it, that by often repeating a lie, a person may, in time, succeed in imposing it upon himself for a truth. “No,” I said, “I must not turn to Elizabeth to teach me where to look for happiness; she knows nothing about it.” My thoughts now involuntarily reverted to one, of whom I ought to have known more, had not I been wholly absorbed by the selfishness of passion, which made my own interest (oh! how miscalled!) the one sole engrossing object of my thoughts—Miss Delmond, poor, neglected, I might certainly say by the Russells, contemned, occurred to me as the human being

most nearly in the possession of our being's "end and aim."

We had frequently met at the Russells; and she had, over and over again, made advances to an intimacy with me, which nothing but my being engrossed by my connexion with Leslie had occasioned me to overlook; for I sincerely respected her. I felt quite in the humour to benefit by her calm discourse, and I determined to dedicate this morning to making her a visit, at her humble dwelling, where I knew I should be a welcome guest; for by that indescribable sympathy which binds us to those who are almost strangers to us, I felt assured that she was interested about me in the strongest degree. Very soon after breakfast, therefore, I repaired to her cottage.

CHAP. III.

MISS DELMOND'S NARRATION.

" Whence but from Heaven could men unskill'd in arts
 In different ages born, and different parts,
 Weave such agreeing truths ; or how, or why
 Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie ?
 Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice,
 Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price."

DRYDEN'S RELIGIO LAICI.

As I find, on referring to a diary in which, for many years, I have been in the habit of inserting such recollections as appeared to me to be worth preserving, that I have retained a far more ample statement of what passed at this interview, than Isabel's rapid sketches permitted, I shall here present to the reader my account of it. She came to me, as she has said, and seldom did a more welcome visitor greet my solitude ; for she has but done herself justice in

saying, that she believed me to be interested about her in the strongest degree. It was easy to perceive, at the first glance, that deep and agonizing emotion was making heavy ravages upon her heart.

I knew from my cousin, Miss Russell, that there was an attachment between Miss Melville and Mr. Leslie; and it was too obvious, from the woeful alteration in her spirits and appearance, which had subsisted ever since her acquaintance with him, that it was not altogether a happy one.

I hastened with extended hand to meet her.

“ My dear Miss Melville,” I said, “ this is indeed kind.”

“ Oh ! - do not say Miss Melville,” she replied, with a languid smile ; “ I never think I am talking to a friend when I am called Miss Melville : you know I am Isabel with every body.”

“ You have made a distinction which

will certainly make you Isabel with me henceforth," I replied.

" Well, but" she went on—" you are very much surprised to see me, no doubt?"

I began to say something about the real pleasure she gave me by her visit ; but, with an attempt at vivacity which ill-concealed an aching heart—

" But you will never guess the purport of my coming," she said. The fact is, I am hunting, not like the philosopher of old, for an honest person, but for something, I believe, quite as rare, and that is, a happy one."

" And what, may I ask, directed you to look for one here ? You could not possibly suspect me of being happy?" and I laughed.

" I cannot tell you how it was, but I thought of every body I knew, and rejected them all as being no nearer happiness than I am myself (though that is saying a great deal) ;" and she

sighed, in spite of her assumed gaiety ; “ but when I thought of you, I paused. I considered, and I actually half believed, that you were about as happy as any body in the world.”

“ A very favourite author of mine, though certainly a quaint, and very far from a polished one,” I replied, “ has this remark : ‘ He is the least unhappy who makes least account of happiness in this world ; who puts himself in God’s way to it ; patiently waits his time for it, and can see a smile on the face of death.’ ”*

“ Ah ! that is a deep observation,” said she ; “ be so good as to repeat it to me ; or stay—let me write it down,” and she took out her tablets. “ I am like a miser in the article of aphorisms and wise sayings,” she continued ; “ you cannot conceive what a quantity of them I have amassed : but, just like the miser’s

* Adam’s Private Thoughts.

heap of gold, there they lie useless. Nevertheless, I will add this to them, if you please."

I repeated the remark, which she wrote down—" *Puts himself in God's way to it,*" she said, with much emphasis, as she read over what she had written, "that, perhaps, is the solution of the whole. In that may be hid the grand secret of happiness."

"Ah! how plainly does such language pourtray the state of your mind," I replied; "that, *perhaps*, is the solution of the whole. In that *may* be hid the grand secret of happiness!"

"Is it, then, a perfect certainty?" she asked.

"With me," I replied, "a perfect certainty. No happiness can be found by any human creature who seeks it in any other way than God has appointed."

"Oh, no, certainly not," she said: but it was in a tone which bespoke the assent she felt herself, as coming under

the denomination of a Christian, called upon to give.

“ If I dare to take the liberty of speaking freely to you—” I said—

“ Pray do,” she exclaimed. “ Say any thing—say every thing. Indeed, to tell you the truth, I came to you to-day for a little comfort. I am not, just now, quite happy.” Here she rose from her seat, and took a turn to the end of the room. “ But never mind that,” she continued; perceiving my deep interest in her, which increased when I found, on resuming her seat, that her countenance was bathed in tears.

“ My dear Miss Melville,” and sitting down by her side, I would have taken her hand, but for a moment only she suffered me; then, hastily withdrawing it—“ you must not be tender to me,” she said; “ be severe—be very severe.”

I saw that her good sense dictated the sort of treatment best adapted to her

case, and though my heart yearned to soothe and comfort her, I believed she judged well in forbidding it.

“ I should be glad, indeed,” she said, as soon as she had regained her composure, “ I should be truly rejoiced, to fall upon some system of conduct that might produce satisfaction ; for now I know and feel that I am far wide of the mark.”

“ And happiness, of course,” I said, “ is your mark, for it is the mark of every one ?”

“ How strange then, is it not,” she said, “ that nobody can find it ?”

“ A few find it, my dear !” I replied, “ and only a few ; because the great mass, the world at large, look for it where it never can be found—they look for it in the perishable things of time and sense—in what is every day and every hour crumbling away even in their very grasp, which the faster it decays the firmer they endeavour to hold, till

the poor nerveless hand itself and all it so tenaciously clasped, is turned into dust and ashes, and 'clean gone for ever.' "

" But yet, the things of time and sense," she said, after a few moments' pause, in which she seemed to consider what I had said, " are pressing upon us so keenly on every side, that some attention must be given them. The world could not go on if we were to live in that state of total abstraction from them which some classes of religionists seem to insist upon."

" I would not wish you to include me amongst that number," I replied; "there may be such persons, and I doubt not that there are ; because, as human nature is imperfect, it will not fail to introduce its own errors and weaknesses into every thing it approaches. Hence, even the pure doctrines of Christianity will not be exempt from corruption and distortion in passing through the polluted channels of humanity ; but all who run may

read. I would say, therefore, to you, and to every one, take not up any opinion upon mere human authority—search the Scriptures; endeavour to get into the spirit of their whole purport and meaning; and leave it to those who delight in quibbles and small details, to dispute about the letter. In their large and comprehensive sense, one principle, one spirit pervades the whole, and is incessantly inculcated, in precept and in doctrine, which is the love and fear of God producing its proper fruits, purity of heart and holiness of life. Where this exists, there will be no mistaken views of happiness—no mistaken opinions as to what is or is not lawful in our pursuit of it. The proper and innocent pleasures of life, which were created for our use, and which lie about us in abundance, will then be rationally and truly enjoyed, because they will be enjoyed in their due measure and degree, which they never can be when they are made the predomi-

nant, not, as they ought to be, the subordinate source of delight. ‘Let the highest affection be placed above this world,’ says a very sensible and pious writer, the amiable Miss Talbot, ‘and every other will rise in just proportion, and the harmony of life be complete.’ ”

“This is—yes, it must be true,” she said, again musing ere she spoke, as if she deeply meditated on all I advanced; “yet—”

“What yet?” I said, “you have desired me to say all I wish to say—let me intreat the same of you; speak all your doubts: perhaps, with the divine blessing upon my humble endeavours, I may be the means of removing some of them.”

“Would not you look upon me then with horror?” she said; “would you not turn from me with recoil, were I to acknowledge to you that—” she paused.

“That you cannot make the Scriptures your rule of life, because you are not

convinced of their divine authority?—is not this what you would say?” I inquired.

“Something like it—at least;”—she was evidently unwilling to make an open avowal of infidelity. “The fact is,” she added, “I have never thought much about it; but if my faith were sincere and fervent, it must be altogether a totally different matter with me—this I distinctly perceive.”

“Doubtless you do,” I replied; “it is very improbable that a young person gifted with so much understanding as you are, should be satisfied with that loose assent which, without taking the trouble to examine, or inquire whether they do or not, multitudes take it for granted they give, to the most important question in which they can be interested; a question which, if it means any thing at all, if it be not altogether a fable, involves nothing less than their everlasting happiness or misery—No; you have had

the sagacity to discover that this languid state of the mind on a matter of such immense importance, is not acquiescence, but insensibility—the natural deadness of the heart upon spiritual subjects ; that moral death which by our first parents' transgression came upon all their descendants, and upon which the spirit of God can alone breathe life and animation."

" Ah, now you are getting a *little* beyond me," she said ; " remember I am stupid upon these things. Before I can appreciate the sublimer truths of revelation, I must understand first principles. I must hear how you acquire the *belief*, which must be the foundation of every thing else. God knows I speak the truth from my heart when I say, I would give all I have, or ever hope to possess, to be a sincere believer in the divine Revelation of which the Scriptures testify ; but I cannot *command* this belief."

“ I admit it,” I replied ; “ I know you cannot ; but you can pray for it ?”

She paused upon this. “ I can attempt it,” at last she said,

“ You can do more than that, surely,” I replied ; “ for instance : you can ask your temporal friends for what you think they can grant you ; but here,” I added, “ I find I must indeed go back to first principles, to use your own expression. Suffer me then to ask you, do you believe in a God at all ?”

“ Certainly,” she replied, without a moment’s hesitation.

“ You believe that every thing which exists has been created by him ?”

“ Unquestionably.”

“ Then, of course, you must also believe him to be the moral Governor of the universe he has created ?”

“ I have a vague belief of it,” she replied ; “ but my feelings upon this point are sadly indistinct.”

“ Can you give me no idea of them ? ”

“ Why,” she replied, “ I think they are of this kind :—I walk abroad, and I look upon the face of nature, and am struck with its beauty ; I observe instances of wisdom and design in all that surrounds me. I behold the sun in the firmament : I feel sure that the hand which formed that glorious object cannot be less than divine. Perhaps I turn my attention inward upon myself, and, while my contemplations are thus directed, I find something within me that prompts a feeling of delight and adoration, and my heart seems as if it involuntarily ascended upwards in praise and worship.”

“ But to whom ? ” I inquired : “ is it not to an ‘ unknown god ? ’ Oh that, like the inspired apostle, I might say, ‘ Him, whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you ! ’ ”

“ Would that you could do me any good ! ” she replied, with affecting ear-

nestness ; “ would that any body could do me any good ! ”

“ It is God alone that can effect that,” I said ; “ but his weak creatures are oftentimes permitted to be the means by which he works his good purposes : and fain—fain would I aspire to be thus employed for you. I would fain change these vague uncertainties, which are misleading you, into a glorious assurance that nothing can shake.—But, to return to our subject : you feel something within you, you say, which prompts you to praise and adore God. But this is principally when your heart is elevated by the contemplation of the beauty of nature ? ”

“ No,” she replied ; “ I feel something like the same emotion when any sublime or exalted sentiment is excited in my mind, by any other cause. For instance, when I hear of noble actions ; when I meet with extraordinary generosity or kindness from my friends ;

when I read of illustrious characters, I say to myself, ‘there must be a reward for all this; there must hereafter be some stage of being where virtue will meet with the requital, the due desert, it does not find in this world.’ And then, perhaps, my heart ascends in something like prayer, that I may attain to a place in those happy realms.”

“In short,” said I, “whenever the natural feeling is strongly excited, your heart rises up to an unknown Being?”

She did not make any reply; and I proceeded:—

“But these moments must be of uncertain recurrence. It happens very often that the face of nature is cloudy; that the sun is not visible; that persons, instead of acting nobly, act selfishly, meanly, and ignobly; that you are condemned to hear and read of unworthy characters; that, instead of meeting with friends, you find enemies.—Then, Isa-

bel, how does your heart feel affected towards this unknown Being?"

She paused ; and, finding she made no reply, I went on ; for my earnestness to persuade her to think upon this great point, gave me an energy in speaking which I knew not how to repress.—

“ Do you then feel the same desire to praise and adore him ? ” I said.

“ I then try to pray,” she said, in a doubting voice.

“ With what feelings do you pray ? ”

“ Surely, with those of hope, that my supplications will be answered,” she replied.

“ Not with an assurance, a certainty, that they will ? ”

Again she was silent. But I constrained her to speak openly to me.

“ Speak to me, dear Isabel,” I said ;
“ lay your heart open to me, dear child, without fear.”

“ I cannot then say,” she replied,

“ that I do feel the certainty and assurance of which you speak.”

No,” said I ; “ I should be surprised if you did, with these vague, unsettled notions you have acquired upon the subject—chiefly, it seems, on a day, when the sun shines, or when some extraordinary benefit has been conferred upon you by a fellow-creature ; or when, in fact, the animal spirits are more especially excited. But, my dear child, I would only ask you—arguing from what you observe in the works of Nature, and what you feel towards their Author—can you think it strange that he has manifested himself by revelation to his creatures, and given them some certain knowledge of himself to guide their conduct and reconcile them to their lot in life ? Would it not rather appear to you strange, if he had left them in uncertainty ? You see design in every thing that exists—a plain and palpable design : you see and comprehend it to be such.

But, without revelation, you can never discover the purpose of your own creation : you can never discover why you should be subject to suffering, or death, or evil of any sort ; or why you should strive against the corruption you feel to be in you. If it be only for your well-doing in this world, it would be hardly worth while to practise the self-denial requisite to form virtuous habits ; yet the good opinion of the world and your own conscience lead you to do this with much pain and discipline—but why or wherefore (without a revelation) you cannot tell.”

“ Oh, yes ! ”—and here she interrupted me—“ I beg your pardon : *I* cannot, indeed, tell you—for I have a wretched memory for every thing but sorrow ; but Adam Smith would give you whole pages to inform you why you feel so, and why you do so ; and why it is right, and why it is wrong.”

“ No doubt,” said I ; “ and a beau-

tiful book is Adam Smith's 'Theory of Moral Sentiments;' but the cause I am now advocating he will not help."

"Still, you must allow, he has accumulated a great quantity of truth," she said.

"Oh, yes! I will give him his due merit," I replied. "But I find the same truths in Scripture, and expressed with a simplicity that is, in my opinion, much more charming. The other morning, in reading some of his 'Theory of Moral Sentiments' (which, as a philosophical work, is one I exceedingly admire), I was forcibly struck with a remark, which I think very just and useful. Speaking of the great source from which, he conceives, both the misery and disorder of human life to arise—namely, our overrating the difference between one situation and another—'Examine,' he says, 'the records of history; recollect what has happened within the circle of your own experience; consider with attention what has been the conduct of al-

most all the greatly unfortunate, either in public or in private life, whom you may have either read of, or heard of, or remembered, and you will find that the misfortunes of by far the greater part of them have arisen from their not knowing when they were well—when it was proper for them to sit still and be contented.’*

This is very true, I thought, as far as it goes; but David has said it better—he has shewn us the *whole* truth; and I turned to the thirty-seventh Psalm, in which the restlessness of human desires is more especially attacked, and the only method of subduing them simply and beautifully taught:—‘Dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and *he* shall bring it to pass.’ What a counteraction is here for the turbulence and inquietude which fills the world with

* Vol. i. p. 370.

wretchedness ! Here, indeed, is truth complete ! Nevertheless, I do not despise philosophy ; only we have a better guide, and cannot, therefore, rest upon it.”

“ Well, let us leave it,” she said ; “ I believe it will never do much for me. Go on, if you please : I am interested in what you say. You were telling me that I did not know why I took (or, in my case, perhaps, you should rather say) why I ought to take pains to govern myself aright and be good,”

“ Yes,” I proceeded, “ I repeat with confidence, that, without the aid of revelation, you can assign no satisfactory reason for these exertions. The vague feelings of praise and adoration, and dependance upon a superior Being, of which you have spoken, warrant nothing beyond a probability that he has allotted you another stage of existence ; and can you, I repeat, think it consistent with the course of his manifest proceedings, that he should give you nothing beyond

a bare *probability* to excite your efforts for moral improvement? Do you not think it more consistent with reason, that he should have revealed to his intelligent creatures the purpose for which they were placed here, and why he has given them a motive to resist sin and cultivate virtue, than that he should have left them to grope their way in the dark, only animated by a probability that their end would not be ‘like that of the beasts that perish?’ Do you not think it also consistent with his manifest benevolence, that, in the tremendous hour of nature’s last trial, he would provide for them some sure rock to rest upon—some sure house of defence?”

“It doubtless is reasonable to suppose it,” she replied, “and the comfort of it no one can dispute. Would that I could perfectly and completely embrace such an opinion!”

“Are you, indeed, sure that this is your wish?” I inquired.

“ I know it is,” she unhesitatingly replied.

“ Then you, most assuredly, may have it accomplished ; for you can try to adopt such an opinion. You can pray to be enlightened : this is the first step. A willing heart is all that is requisite. Those, indeed, who love the world, and the things that belong to the world, can have no desire to be taught these things, which belong to a kingdom which, we are expressly told, ‘ is not of this world.’ In this poor, perishable scene, such persons find *their* god, and he blinds their hearts. ‘ Verily, they have their reward !’ But you, Isabel, I am persuaded, cannot be satisfied with so poor a portion ; you must be deeply sensible of its emptiness and vanity—a character which is pronounced to belong to it, even by the poor deluded creatures who still cannot turn from its acknowledged deceits and unsatisfactoriness.”

“ Indeed, I *am* sensible of it,” she

said. "Even at my age, I should esteem it a blessing never to have been born."

"I hope you will live to reckon that one of the blessings for which you acknowledge the most joyful gratitude," I said.

"Ah! if I were like you," she replied; "but life to me is so full of suffering! My heart—my affections! Oh! by how many avenues does sorrow approach me! Alas! if it were lawful to wish for death——"

She paused.

"What comfort would it bring to you, my dear Isabel?" I said.

She shook her head, but said nothing; and I went on.—

"What do I look forward to?" must, then, be your inquiry, if it never occurred before. "What sort of judge am I to meet?" "

"He must be good," she said; "for all his works bespeak him so."

"But you are not certain of it," I

replied ; “ you have no assurance that he is not arbitrary : the existence of evil might warrant a fearful doubt of it ; and, surely, you must think it an argument against the goodness to which you trust, that he should have given you nothing certain—nothing real—nothing comforting, to support you in this tremendous crisis—no knowledge whither you are going ; or, if all is to end with your fast fleeting life ! Oh, Isabel ! do you think that, at that awful moment, if not before, you will not do as countless thousands have done—eagerly catch at the promises of Scripture, and cry out, in the anguish of your soul, ‘ Oh, slighted Bible ! would that I had valued you aright ! Oh, neglected Saviour ! wilt thou now manifest thyself to me, and give me comfort ? Wilt thou accept this death-bed faith ? Wilt thou pardon me so many neglected opportunities of seeking and of finding Thee ?—so much obstinate indifference and hardness of heart

towards Thee?—so much disdain of thy word?—so much contempt of thy precious promises, which now I would so gladly have a share in—now that, perhaps, I must hear thee say, ‘Thou hast ‘neither part nor lot in this matter! Depart from me; I never knew ye!’ Oh, Isabel! think of this—not in the fearful hour of death, but now—now—while life and health put salvation in your power—my dearest, think of it!”

She was affected by the genuine sincerity with which I pleaded.

“I am not, perhaps, so senseless upon this subject as you may suppose,” she said. “The sacred volume is not a sealed book to me; I often read it.”

“But how?” I said. “Do you read it upon your knees? By which I mean, do you read it with a praying heart—an uplifted voice? ‘Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!’”

“I fear not,” said she, with a deep sigh; I have been too much accus-

tomed to read the Bible as any other book."

"Then do not wonder that you have made little progress in understanding it," I replied. "Read the Bible as you would any other book! What! do you believe that the word of God is to be perused as a common, human composition?—that it is to be approached without feelings of awe, of humiliation, of reverence, of prayer? Do you rush upon it with a presumptuous idea, that, without the divine blessing, you can possibly enter into its spirit?"

"Surely, the historical parts——" said she. But I interrupted her.

"It is curious," said I, "how instinctively persons apply themselves as learners to those parts of the Scriptures with which they have the least concern! I would not preclude the perusal of any part of the Bible, when the mind is prepared to receive it properly; but I should say to you at present, 'Do not

turn to the historical parts. Read the prophecies, in order to understand the well-established fact in the Jewish history—that they looked for the coming of an extraordinary person, therein foretold in the clearest terms. However incredulous you may be upon other subjects contained in holy writ, this must command your assent.’ It must strike you with wonder to remark how literally the life and character of the Saviour coincides with what the prophet Isaiah foretold of him many ages before he came into the world ; a coincidence so complete, that, as it has been justly observed, it seems more like a history than a prophecy. Many persons are constrained to admit this, who still, by the most marvellous blindness, remain, upon the whole, adversaries to the Christian faith. Read the prophetic Psalms—the second, especially ; see how David, long prior to the prophecy of Isaiah, clearly foretells the same events. Then trace up this illus-

trious prophecy yet higher ; you find it interwoven in every part of the Jewish records—till you discover its announcement from God himself to our first parent immediately after his fall. What can we say to these things, Isabel ? They stand their ground, you see ; they live—they triumph even over the sneer of the insidious, and the open assault of the bolder infidel. What can we say, but that truth is in them ? And the cause of truth must prevail.”

“ I will certainly forthwith apply myself in a very different manner to search into them,” she said. “ Still, I must say, admitting all you advance to be unanswerable, there are parts of the Scriptures which stagger my perfect reliance upon other parts. Such, for instance, as represent the Deity ordering the destruction of whole nations—the murder of particular persons——”

“ Excuse me,” said I, “ for interrupting you ; but all that you are now

saying has been advanced and refuted by the enemies and the advocates of divine revelation over and over again. I do but repeat, therefore, what its far more powerful defenders have said for it on this point, when I remind you that, upon the same principle on which you now argue against it, you might reason against entertaining any of the vague feelings of praise and adoration you sometimes experience towards the Deity. Because, the fact is, that evil always exists. Innocent beings and whole nations, though not now by miracle extirpated from the earth, are still as much afflicted. A child, that cannot have incurred any actual guilt, is born blind or deformed; earthquakes make ravages amongst whole nations; men murder and rob, and injure those who not only never injured them, but who, perhaps, are amongst the most exemplary of created beings. Though the Almighty does not now, by visible signs, command these

things to be performed upon a part of his creatures, yet he evidently permits them, and it does not stagger your faith in his goodness. But this is a curious fact in human nature. Put revelation out of the question, and persons bring to every thing else the right disposition. Upon the existence of evil they will talk with infinite wisdom ; that is, they will acknowledge the subject to be beyond the reach of finite faculties, and conceive it best disposed of by humble acquiescence in its being useful, because it is the will of God that it exists. But once bring them closely to speak of their opinions upon revelation, and they will confess with you, that there are certain points in it which stagger them. In short, there they cannot exercise the same simplicity of assent ; there, where it most behoves them to yield it ; there, where every thing depends upon a humble, meek, perfect acquiescence, and the

simple acknowledgment, ‘ Lord, I believe ; help thou my unbelief!’ ”

“We may all of us put up that prayer,” she replied ; “ I am sure I very sincerely make it mine ; for I cannot tell you how fervent is my desire to be a *real* believer.”

“ Only promise me,” said I, “ that you will daily read such parts of the Bible as you feel that you can comprehend—the New Testament and St. Paul’s Epistles more especially ; you would soon be enabled to judge whether the belief of them is calculated to impart comfort or not—whether they tend to form any sure basis for the mind to rest upon in affliction or death ; both of which are the only circumstances you are certain of having to encounter. You will be capable of understanding whether this conviction : ‘ I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith—henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

the righteous judge, shall give me at that day,' is calculated, not only to smooth the rugged brow of death, but even to make it lovely as the image of immortality. You will judge whether it would be sweet and comforting to the soul to receive this assurance from a Divine Being, as powerful as he is willing, to save all who fly to Him, 'if a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and will make our abode with him.' In short, Isabel, you will find in this precious study, so much to console and to delight your heart; so much to strengthen and to guide your conduct; so much to awaken your love and confidence in the Saviour, that when once you have steadily and constantly entered upon it, I feel persuaded I shall never again hear you speak of *vague* feelings of praise and adoration; nothing will then be vague, for you will *know* whom you have believed; you will not then be the sport of

uncertain devotion, which rises and falls with external circumstances, springing from mere feeling, and as variable and as valueless as the source from whence it rises; no, you will have one constant stable principle, the same at all times, and under all circumstances; for it will be built upon Him who is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever!"

"God grant it!" she said, with energy.

"He *will* grant it, my dear!" I replied; "You have His promise repeated again and again, that those who seek Him shall surely find Him. 'If any man lack wisdom,' says St. James, 'let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.' 'Ask and it shall be given to you,' says our blessed Lord himself: 'Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?' Be com-

forted, then, dear child ! in all your sorrows you have always at hand a sure source of comfort, if with your whole heart and soul you apply to this divine Book with a praying heart ; and for human consolation, if I can at any time, be of the least use to you, I cannot say how grateful an occupation I should deem it !”

She pressed my hand, but did not speak. I could have wished yet longer to have detained her ; but I believed we had discoursed sufficiently long for the present upon this subject ; and dreading nothing so much as wearying her, I did not oppose her rising to take leave ; only stipulating that she would not leave me quite ignorant of her proceedings relative to what we had talked of. She assured me she would not fail to tell me all the feelings of her heart. Alas ! I felt a sad anticipation that the world and its delusions were yet too potent, and that the hour of her emancipation from its thral-

dom was yet far distant ! But at this moment I could not venture such a surmise to her ; against hope I was willing to hope. But her own account of herself, which I now resume, will pourtray a too faithful picture.

CHAP. IV.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

Heaven would not all this woe for man intend,
If man's existence with his woe should end ;
Heaven would not pain, and grief and anguish give,
If man were not by discipline to live ,
And for that brighter, better world prepare,
That souls with souls, when purified, shall share
Those stains all done away that must not enter there !

CRABBE.

My conversation with Miss Delmond produced, for a short time, a very powerful effect upon me ; for, from the earliest period that I was capable of reflection, I had frequently turned my thoughts to the great subject of religion. But it had been in the vague and unsettled manner in which I usually turned my mind to the consideration of every thing. Now, however, I did for a while dwell upon it, but it was only for a while ; my

anxieties about Leslie engrossed me wholly. I expected to hear from him as a matter of course, during his absence. He had not, indeed, promised that he would write to me, nor had I requested it, because I took it for granted that he would, without my saying any thing about it. For the first week of his absence I was tolerably patient, because I allowed him time to have arrived comfortably at the end of his journey, and to have written me the most diffuse epistle before I would permit myself to be made quite miserable by his failing to do so.

“He could not very well write till such a day,” I used to repeat to myself almost every five minutes; and then I went over and over again with unceasing interest in my calculations of the distance that divided us, the accidents that might impede a letter from being written exactly at the moment I expected, &c. &c. At last, when it became quite clear, that time had been granted

for every sort of trifling impediment to his writing, my state of mind bordered upon frenzy.

I know of nothing more agitating to a nervous, irritable frame, than the expectation of an interesting letter. Every morning brought with it such feelings of excited hope as were positively agonizing, so terrible was the possibility of their being disappointed.

A lover's letter is at all times a matter of no small interest to the person it addresses ; but in my peculiar case it was especially so : for the departure of Leslie was involved in much mystery ; and, from some vague hints he had dropped, I had reason to suppose it connected with that explanation of his future views and intentions, upon which my destiny was suspended. Ever since I acquiesced in the clandestine measures he proposed, I had found sufficient sorrow and disquiet to attend them ; but not till now had I experienced so fully their wretched conse-

quences. I saw that I had put my happiness in the power of a man who might or might not, make a generous use of his influence. His present neglect of me too painfully warranted a belief that he regarded our connexion in a far less sacred light, than he would have done had it been honourably acknowledged to my best and natural protectors.

“ He would not have dared to trifle with me thus,” I said to Elizabeth Russell, one morning when I had made myself sure of receiving a letter from him, and had been as usual disappointed.

“ He would not have dared to trifle with me thus, if he did not know that I cannot speak of it to my aunt and uncle. I cannot complain of his conduct ; he knows that I cannot do this, whatever I may suffer : and thus he presumes upon my folly—my idiotism !” and tears of scorn almost choked my utterance.

“ I am sure, if I really thought this,”

said Elizabeth, "I would soon shew him his mistake—I would break with him directly."

"You would!" I exclaimed, only wishing at that angry moment for some spur, some incitement, to retaliate upon him the wretchedness he occasioned me.

"Undoubtedly I would," she replied, "if I really believed that he was purposely trifling with my feelings. But you do not believe this of him, Isabel—you cannot."

"I know not what to think," I replied; "I know nothing but that I am most miserable, most wretched! Oh, what would I give, never—never to have seen his face!"

"Come, come," she replied, endeavouring to soothe and comfort me, "you take the matter too seriously. Leslie loves you very dearly."

"Do you think he does, Elizabeth?"

"I am certain of it. What! would

a man act so and so ?” and she specified instances wherein she believed he had strongly manifested his affection for me ; instances it charmed away my grief to hear her speak of. “ Do you think a man could act thus without being very sincerely attached ?”

“ Surely he could not !” I replied in a doubting tone : not because I really questioned his love ; but because it was so sweet to me to hear it confirmed by the opinion of another, that I could have been glad to have listened to her through the whole day, while she spoke of Leslie’s attachment to me. In pursuing this enchanting theme I forgot my indignation against him ; I united with Elizabeth in conjecturing once more some causes for his silence. The result of the whole was, that, considering all things, he might not have been able to write so soon as we supposed. “ I think to-morrow, Isabel, you will have a

letter," she said, as she parted from me.

I shook my head. This delusive *to-morrow* had failed me too often to be much trusted.

"Yes, I feel a presentiment that you will hear of him to-morrow," she repeated, with a confidence which imparted something of the same feeling to me. She then departed, leaving me with a temporary exhilaration of spirits, which, in my ignorance of poor deceiving and deceived human nature, I mistook for an interval of reasonable thought.

"It is very foolish to be so impatient as I am," I said to myself; "I am certainly very wrong—very much misguided; I must discipline my heart and affections; I *must* bear to suffer for a time;"—and I thought of my serious conversation with Miss Delmond. This thought brought with it a recollection that I had paid no attention to her wish of seeing me again. It had been impos-

sible, indeed, that I should do so, while my mind was in the disturbed and miserable state it had been in during the last week.

Now, however, I felt an interval (as I supposed) of sober reflection, and now I thought I would call upon her; but on looking at my watch, I found it was her dinner-hour, and I postponed it till the morrow. A thought crossed my mind, as I decided upon this, that my capability of visiting Miss Delmond, and listening to her tranquil, quiet conversation, would very much depend upon my hearing from Leslie; for if I was again disappointed, I knew I should have no spirits for any society but that of Miss Russell; but it was the thought only of an instant—I gave it no indulgence. I was, for the present, in too good humour with myself, to suppose I was at all likely to be such a victim to circumstances, or that I could so soon forget the moral lesson in which I was now trying to instruct myself.

I sat down to read for the first time since Leslie's departure. I did not feel inclined, just then, to turn to the sacred volume which Miss Delmond had recommended me to study. "By and bye, I shall read it regularly," I said.

A little volume of detached thoughts and sentences, by the Reverend Mr. Adam, which she had lent me when we parted after our last interview, suited me exactly, and I sat down to it with some interest. I was always fond of exercising my mind in reflection, and this little volume afforded me ample materials for thought.

Many of the sentiments were expressed in quaint, and even coarse language; some I could not understand, and some were, as I thought, ludicrous in their conception, and in the words that conveyed it. But here and there I met with one which not only made me think, but which made me feel deeply—painfully.

"Lord forgive me my sins, and suffer me to keep them—Is this the meaning

of my prayers?" was a remark which occasioned me for a long time to muse upon the coldness, the heartlessness, with which, from habit rather than any better motive, I daily offered up a formal petition to the Throne of Mercy.

"Have I ever earnestly, and with a fervour proportioned to my great need of help, solicited for a new heart; a more subdued will; a more patient spirit?" I asked myself.

"How true is that!" I said, as I read the following; "We expect submission and amendment from the wrong person: we should expect them from ourselves."

I went on to another, and my heart sunk within me; and I closed the book for awhile to think upon it. "God has only one way of bringing all to himself: *viz.* by martyrdom, or the crucifixion of our wills."

"Must I suffer?" I thought—"is it indispensable?" and I shuddered at the suggestion. I never had but one idea

of suffering at this time, which was, the possibility of Leslie's deserting me. "Any thing but that," I thought; "I am sure I could be resigned to any trial but that!"

Alas! is not this the language of every sufferer, professing acquiescence in any species of trial but that which is ordained? My reflections became so painful that I could not bear to dwell upon them; I resumed my book, in the hope of finding them directed into a less agitating channel. I was, as usual, willing to be taught, but not to be troubled; as if instruction were not to be purchased with some difficulty—some endurance: as if any thing valuable could be introduced into the mind with the same facility as ideas enter it during sleep!

But the very next remark I read, could not be considered without pointing to the same sacrifice; that subjugation of will, which can alone improve

the human creature, and bring him into communion with his Maker.

“ I did not know,” Mr. Adam remarks, “ how much I was given up to earthly comforts, till they were taken from me, and I was reduced to the necessity of living upon God.” On reading this, I felt compelled to muse upon the total surrender I had made of my time, my talents, my thoughts, to one object—one earthly object—of which it was in the power of any casualty to bereave me : and if such were to be the case, what had I to turn to ? I thought that I would read no more ; but I had cast my eyes upon the succeeding sentence, and insensibly I went through with it. The writer seemed to rejoice in having obtained a sudden ray of truth, and thus expressed himself :—

“ Now for a single eye, and a pure heart ! now there seems to be an opening to the happy time of forsaking all ! It is only a glimpse ; but if I keep my

attention fixed upon it, it will bring me full into the light."

Something like conviction darted upon me respecting his meaning, and seemed to let in a ray of faint illumination upon the dark chaos of my own mind; but an instinctive assurance that I must suffer pain in tracing out this ray of light and truth, induced me at once to close the book.

"He is a strange writer," I said; and, like Felix, I thought "at a more convenient season, I will talk with him again."

But this convenient season was not likely to happen very soon.

The following morning brought with it only one thought—one feeling—one wish—one hope: should I hear from Leslie?

Whether it had been the representation of Elizabeth Russell, or the sole work of my restless imagination, or the result of all together, I never had felt

more confidence that I should receive a letter from him, than on this morning. I went down to breakfast in the most joyous expectation. My aunt and uncle looked at me now and then with surprise: for it was now a very unusual thing to see any expression of pleasure or animation on my face.

The moment that breakfast was over, I took my station at the window to watch for the welcome sight of the postman. The letter, if any arrived, would not, I knew, be brought into the parlour: for my discreet old Mary, the housemaid, understood better how to manage my interests. But I should have the satisfaction of seeing if the postman stopped at the door; and the possibility of his stopping for any other purpose than to leave a letter for me, never occurred to me. At last I saw him stop at a house exactly opposite our's. Nothing but the presence of my uncle and aunt prevented me from

throwing up the window, and asking him across the street if he had got a letter for me.

The detestable servant kept him waiting at the door, and there he stood, so careless, not conjecturing how my heart was beating, till it was almost convulsed with anxiety for his arrival. Presently the maid-servant opened the door! The wretched woman had got no money about her to pay for the letter he delivered, and was gone for a century to fetch it. Then he counted the change as slowly into her hand, as if he had nothing to do but to wait upon her. "What business has a postman to be slow?" I thought; "he should fly—fly—Oh! but he is coming! No! yes! he does come! he does! he knocks at the hall door!" and I flew out of the room. "For me? it is for me!" and I almost snatched a letter out of the footman's hand. "It is for my master, ma'am." I scarcely listened to, or believed, till

old Mary, who had also appeared in high expectation, repeated in a compassionate tone, "It is only a letter for my master, Miss Isabel!" I hurried up stairs—I threw myself upon my bed—I gave myself up to floods of tears: I sobbed—like the veriest infant disappointed in its wishes, I sobbed as if my heart would break! Many hours wore away, and I still reclined upon my bed, exhausted with the indulgence I had given to feeling. It was so usual with me to retire to my own room from the hour of breakfast till dinner, that no inquiry had been made for me by my aunt or uncle. My mind had not been idle during this time: I revolved every sort of letter to write to Leslie, for to write to him I was resolved. I must act—I must do. I could not endure this state of horrid stillness and suspense; but how should I write to him? What had I to say? Break with him at once, said pride. "Yes; I will—I

will !” and I not only got up to put in force my intention, but I began several epistles to him to testify it. I could not, however, proceed further than the first three lines. I remembered some testimony of his love ; and then the burning tears fell in streams upon the paper, and I was constrained to cast it away from me, and think of nothing but what was tender and affectionate. Then I would write to him soothingly : I would expostulate with him—I would entreat him not to trifle with my love ; and thus I addressed him. But the thought of what he had caused me to suffer, of what he still might cause me to suffer in protracted suspense, again brought over me the sternest feelings. Anger and scorn induced me to tear into a hundred pieces what I had thus written : and, hopeless and helpless, once more I cast myself upon my bed, and became again the prey of the most deplorable wretchedness. I wished to

see Elizabeth Russell, and had, in one short interval of misery, written a note, intreating her to call. She had sent me word that she feared she could not ; but, if possible, she would. This answer had, of course, augmented my sorrows ; I knew and cared nothing for the reason that prevented her complying with my request—I thought and cared for nobody but myself : my sorrows were my world. About an hour before dinner, I heard a knock at the house door ; I looked from my window, and perceived Miss Delmond standing there. The idea of encountering her, and her tranquillity, at this moment overwhelmed me with horror. I ran to the top of the stairs, in terror that I should not be in time to prevent her admission.

“ Not at home ! not at home ! ” I said to the servant, who was about to answer to her signal : “ I am at home to nobody but Miss Russell.”

I heard her repeat after him, in a

tone of real vexation, " Miss Melville is not at home ! I am very sorry. Pray, give my best regards to her."

Almost at the same instant Miss Russell arrived, and was admitted, before Miss Delmond had quitted the door. Absorbed as I was in selfishness, I felt ashamed of the affront I was putting upon her, in thus openly testifying that I preferred the society of Miss Russell to her's ; and, when Elizabeth first greeted me, I could not avoid speaking of my regret upon the occasion.

She soon, however, silenced me by proving that Miss Delmond never was offended with any body ; and that, in fact, if she were, it was not of the least consequence in the world.

She then began to inquire into my present discomfort with a languid and dissatisfied air, which soon proved that, to add to my miseries, I had applied to her at a time when something or other

of her own occupied her too much to permit her to give me the whole, undivided attention, which alone suited the unreasonableness of my demands.

“ Yesterday, how kind she was !” I thought ; “ and, to-day, how cold !”

Poor, blind creature ! Why did I not rather look within, and see the radical error there, in my deficiency of that sole principle which would have elevated me beyond the caprice of people and of circumstances.

“ Such is friendship !” was my petulant conclusion. Nevertheless, I asked her opinion about the propriety of my writing to Leslie, and breaking with him at once.

“ He would not believe you !” was her only reply.

“ Would he not ?” I retorted, with the utmost scorn. “ To prove to him that I will do it, you yourself, Elizabeth, shall see me write—for it will be

only a few lines, and you shall put them into the post yourself."

" You seem to have made many unsuccessful attempts to address him, however, Isabel!" and she glanced at my writing-desk, where fragments of letters lay in all directions—the result of my profitless, unhappy morning's occupation.

There was a tone of irony in her address which I could not bear.

" I see," said I, " that I have presumed upon you too much ; I see that I am troublesome ; don't let me detain you !"

I tried to speak calmly ; but the rage that possessed me rendered it a fruitless effort.

" Intrude ! presume ! what is it that you mean ?" she said.

" I mean what I say ! Pray go."

She seemed half-inclined to obey me, but I was really suffering too visibly and too deeply to be abandoned ; and, though

with evident displeasure, she returned towards me :

“ I don’t know how Leslie manages with you, Isabel !” she said, “ but, upon my word, if you are as provoking to him——”

She paused, unwilling to say any thing to exasperate me, but not much disposed to submit to my imperious spirit.

I felt the justice of her resentment ; I felt sensible of my faults—God knows, I felt deeply sensible of them !

“ I *am* very provoking, Elizabeth,” I said ; “ I know I am. But, if you knew what I am suffering——”

She soothed me, and I became more composed. I once more resumed the wretched theme of my disappointed expectations. Once more she besought me to have patience—to think of what my pride demanded of me.

“ He *must* soon be explicit,” she said. “ Even granting that he did not write at all during his absence, he must

soon come back; and then all will be explained."

I yielded a reluctant assent to the probability of what she advanced, and mournfully promised to be guided by it.

CHAP. V.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

When wishes only weak the heart surprise,
Heaven, in its mercy, the fond prayer denies ;
But when our wishes are both vain and weak,
Heaven, in its justice, gives us what we seek.

CRAEZE.

THREE weeks at length elapsed, during which time I had been sick, and dying with the agonies of suspense, and ready to have obtained intelligence of Leslie almost by the sacrifice of my pride, to me the greatest of sacrifices. I had been watching daily and hourly for something like incident ; but life seemed to stand still with me : a more than usual monotony pervaded every thing. My uncle and aunt were evidently not satisfied with my behaviour, which, without being disrespectful, was

not far from appearing sullen, owing to the terrible dejection of my heart. I could not go to Miss Delmond—for my mind was inaccessible to any kind of calm or rational conversation. Elizabeth Russell was evidently weary of supporting my spirits, by re urging, every time we met, the same counsel. In short, vacuity the most terrible pervaded me in every shape ; and with such sickness at heart did I daily rise to crawl through the heavy day, that, if I had not been compelled, by respect to my aunt and uncle, to pay some attention to appearances and regular habits, I should, I believe, have taken to my bed at once, and continued there till some intelligence of Leslie had reached me.

I had now become so far insensible to the postman's knock, as to feel sure that he brought me nothing. Nevertheless, till that was past, the horror of having nothing to expect was not quite complete. At the end of three weeks

I began insensibly to revive a little; for now the period of Leslie's return was arrived. But still very little comfort came with this idea: for every answer Miss Russell brought me, to the daily inquiries I caused her to make, informed me, that as yet Mr. Hodson had received no letter to announce his pupil's return. At last she came to me one morning, very early, and, by the first glance I cast upon her countenance, I saw she had something to impart.

I have generally found, in the course of my experience, that it seldom answers to be in a hurry for events.

A peculiar faculty I possessed of looking for evil, made me fancy that what she had to communicate was not of a pleasant nature. In fact, my imagination had so often misled me by false promises, and had so frequently brought upon me the bitterest disappointment, that, young as I was, it had become so far sobered by experience, that I ever

mistrusted its delusive voice when it whispered that happiness was at hand.

My aunt was present, and some common-place discourse for a few minutes occupied us, or rather them ; for I could only study Elizabeth's countenance with an anxiety which rendered me silent. She made some excuse of wanting to borrow something from me, and we hastened upstairs together. The door was scarcely closed upon us, when I impatiently inquired,—

“ Have you not some news for me ? ”

“ I have,” was her reply.

“ Good or bad ? ”

“ I will tell you presently.”

“ We were now in my own room, and, without again urging my question, I fixed upon her a look that, I doubt not, told her my whole soul ; for, turning away from me with real emotion,—

“ I know not how to answer you, Isabel,” she said ; and then she sat

down, and pressed her hand before her eyes.

I sat down, too, for my whole frame shook with agitation. I saw that some dreadful storm was about to burst upon me, and, without knowing what was the nature or extent of what I was to suffer, I quailed beneath the terror of it.

“Something respecting Leslie!” I faltered out.

She raised her head.

“He is unworthy of you, Isabel!” she said, with an energy which left me no doubt of her believing the truth of what she asserted.

My heart died within me! I had no power to defend him—no power to inquire how or why she condemned him. All I could say was,—

“Don’t tell me so, Elizabeth! tell me any thing but that!”—and I gasped for breath. I saw that all mystery was about to be resolved by some tremendous

burst of intelligence, and, as if my shrinking from the communication of it could reduce it to a fable or a dream with wretched infatuation I recoiled from hearing it.

“ Say any thing but that Leslie does not love me !” I repeated. “ You have not to say that ?”—and with desperate eagerness I caught her hand—“ you have not to say that, Elizabeth ?”

She was silent.

“ Say all—say every thing !” I faintly exclaimed : “ if you have that to tell me, I can hear nothing worse !” and I waited without tear or sigh for all she had to impart ; for my feelings were far beyond the mournful relief of either. I only tried to dissipate the pent-up agony of my spirits by walking up and down the room, endeavouring to allay the beating of my heart by the pressure of my clasped hands : yet in vain ! it throbbed as if it would have burst my bosom, and I was compelled to sit down.

“ My dear Isabel !” said Elizabeth, coming to me, with the tears stealing down her cheeks, as she observed and pitied the dumb sorrow which so heavily oppressed me, “ do not thus give way ; I shall fear to tell you any thing.”

“ No—do not fear,” I said : “ tell me all ; I shall be better in hearing it. You say that he does not love me ! I can hear any thing after that.”

“ I know not how to reconcile the idea of his loving you with the undoubted fact I have just heard of his——”

She hesitated.

“ Say on,” I exclaimed — “ say every thing !”

“ I have just heard, then,” she proceeded, “ from Mrs. Hodson, that Leslie has been long engaged to a young lady near London, and that he is certainly to marry her as soon as he is of age.”

Well as I believed I could have supported any tidings after I had listened to

those which informed me that he did not love me, I found there was in store for me a pang more poignant still—a pang unrivalled by any in the anguish which attends on disappointed love—“Engaged to another ! love another !”

I did not want for tears now ! they burst in torrents from my eyes—they convulsed me ! “Love another !” was all I could, for many minutes, incessantly repeat. At length,

“It cannot be, Elizabeth ! it surely cannot be !” I said. “Can you think that he loved any one but me ? oh, tell me sincerely all you think—can you believe that he loved any one but me ?”

“No, certainly,” she replied, “judging from his conduct, I should say, without hesitation, that he was passionately attached to you.”

“Oh ! and so he was ! he was—I never will believe otherwise !” I vehemently repeated, as if in the very assurance I convinced myself of its truth.

“ Yet, this strange intelligence ! what can it mean ? tell it me just as you heard it, Elizabeth.”

She repeated it ; but my questions were so numerous and so involved, from the confusion that reigned in my mind, that I scarcely knew what she said. The substance of it seemed to be this : that on calling upon Mrs. Hodson, she had received from that lady the intelligence she had just imparted to me ; which intelligence it did not appear had arrived from Leslie himself (as of him they had heard nothing since his departure) but had accidentally been communicated to them by some person lately arrived who knew the lady, and all the circumstances relative to the affair.

Greatly as I was disturbed in the first instance by so unexpected a blow, I could not avoid to try and find comfort for myself by the very many ways in which it appeared to me this intelligence might turn out of no impor-

tance. "It might be an old affair that Leslie wished, and was gone to dissolve," I said ; but Elizabeth could not agree with me. The person who brought this information was so certain of the case ; nay, he added "that Leslie now, at this very time, was visiting the young lady."

"Now !" and I interrupted her, with a hope that she was not sure of what she said ; "not now—perhaps you may be mistaken !"

"No, Isabel, I am not mistaken ; I could have thought, with you, that he had been entangled in some engagement before he saw you, with a girl he could not love, and that this was the obstacle which impeded his being candid with you till it was removed ; with a view to which, I should have concluded, he was now absent. But when we find him now, at this time, after his connexion with you—"

"Oh yes," I said, "it is too intelligible ! he is, indeed, unworthy of my

love ! Now, indeed, I may write to him ; now I have a subject !” and my poor wounded heart felt a momentary revival, in the triumph of being the first to break our connexion.

“ He shall not have to discard me, Elizabeth !—no, no ; he shall not do that !”

“ Wait a little while,” she said, taking my hand with a smile which could not, perhaps, have been suppressed by any one who saw the curious sort of comfort which my wayward nature was providing for itself ; but a smile, nevertheless, which I stigmatized in my heart as cruel mockery at such a moment—“ Wait a little while,” she repeated.

But, again bursting into tears, I turned away from her.

“ No one feels for me !” I said ; “ would that I were in my grave !—oh ! would that I were in my grave ; for in this world I never, never shall be happy !”

She was forbearing and considerate. She would not speak unkindly to me at this bitter moment ; and when she hung over me with compassionate and soothing words, I felt and acknowledged the petulance which wrung such expressions from me.

“ I know that I am very unjust and very unreasonable,” I said ; “ but this is so hard a blow—so very hard !” and again my voice was lost in anguish.

“ I know it is a dreadful stroke !” she replied ; “ but you will get the better of it ; depend upon it, my dear Isabel, your pride will support you.”

“ My pride !” and I shook my head ; I felt how poor a prop was human pride at this sad moment.

“ You cannot, just now, perhaps, feel otherwise than deeply wounded by such treatment,” she continued ; “ but take my word for it, in one week you will see him in his true colours - you will despise him as he deserves.”

“Oh! Elizabeth,” I exclaimed, “this is sad comfort! to think that all the consolation I can look forward to, is in despising a man so dear to me!—yes, even now—”

“What, even now!” and she looked at me reproachfully. “Just think of his deceit! just think of what he has caused you to suffer during the last three weeks! just figure to yourself how his time has been passing in devoted attention to another woman, while you—”

“Oh! no, no, no!”—I almost shrieked, “I cannot think of it! I will not think of it!”

“But, my dear creature, you must think of it,” she said; “why will you deceive yourself!—of what use is it to shut your eyes against conviction?”

“Of none—I know it is of none,” I replied, “and I will not do it! yet, oh, Elizabeth! what *can* I do? Ah! God direct and comfort me!” and as the involuntary prayer escaped my lips, I felt that I had touched the only string that

breathed of consolation. I pressed my hands before my eyes, and silently ejaculated a fervent supplication for divine assistance. The very thought in some degree composed me, though but for a brief interval. I wish, indeed, most clearly to state, that in these upliftings of an agitated heart, I trace nothing beyond mere natural impulse ; nothing of the regular, habitual, instinctive turning of a pious heart, under all circumstances and in every situation, to God, as its supreme source of comfort, of joy, of hope, and of delight. Alas, no ! as yet this sublime principle had no dwelling in my heart ! my prayers were the result of an amazed and terrified spirit, broken by unexpected misfortune, and not knowing for what or by whom it is afflicted, flying for succour to its long-neglected God ! Yet, so merciful and tender is He over all his creatures, that even to the prayer which nothing but distress extorts, He lends a ready ear ! He waits to be gra-

cious!—Oh! how many slighted opportunities of giving myself up to his designs, and casting myself low before his throne, have I to number! Sorrow after sorrow has He sent me—summons after summons I would call them; and yet my stubborn heart still lingered in this vale of misery, and all its aspirations after better things, all its consciousness of suffering and unkindness, and the deceitfulness of those it loved and trusted; all its bitterness and all its agony, has only prompted a few passing thoughts of God and of eternity, and back it wanders to its idols and its vanities, till the last warning comes!—Oh, wise are those who know the precious use of trial and adversity! and well may we all adopt the language of the Poet, when he exclaims—

O sacred sorrow! by whom souls are tried,
Sent, not to punish mortals, but to guide;
If thou art mine, and who shall proudly dare
To tell his Maker he has had his share?
Still let me feel for what thy pangs are sent,
And be my guide, and not my punishment.

CRABBE.

It was but a temporary aid I derived from supplications like those I offered to Heaven. The root of an earth-directed spirit was within me, and nothing but earthly passions could spring from it. After seeing me every successive minute the sport and victim of a fresh burst of feeling, Elizabeth, at the end of the morning, left me decided to write to my perfidious lover. This was the only measure I could pursue, if I intended to adopt any upon the information I had received; and when we came to talk the matter over more calmly, she seemed to see, equally with me, the propriety of my having the wretched gratification of being the party to break the connexion, since it appeared that broken it must be.

To have something to do, especially something so decisive, so energetic as this, gave me a degree of animation, and protracted, for a while, the full force of this heavy grief from totally overpowering me. I was able to make my appear-

ance before my aunt and uncle at dinner, though with a prodigious effort, and only in the strength of thinking over in my mind the letter I was to write to Leslie directly afterwards.

As soon as I could, I returned to my room, and with a vehement struggle I repelled the rising tears, which almost blinded me as I began to write, in a strain—oh! how different from that in which I had so often addressed him! But this *was* to be a day of event! for, ere I had concluded three lines of what I intended to say to him, the old maid-servant, who was the medium of his communicating with me, entered the room with a note, which I saw in an instant came from Leslie; and before she could speak her errand, I had snatched it out of her hand, and read as follows:

“ I am just returned; I need not say how impatient I am to see you; do, dearest Isabel! repair in about an hour,

to our usual place of meeting, where you will find your devotedly attached

“ E. LESLIE.”

The servant had retired, and I was at liberty to ponder and exclaim, and walk up and down my room in a paroxysm of new and tumultuous feeling, made up of fresh hopes and expectations. It was impossible, I assured myself, that he could be *now* prosecuting his attentions to another woman, and yet so anxious to keep up an intercourse with me that the very instant of his return he should seek an interview with me — perhaps he came to tell me every thing ; to explain every mystery—perhaps! oh, it was certain! there could be no doubt of it! no, not the shadow of a doubt!—Dear, dear Leslie! how unjust have I been to you! at the very time, too, when you were hastening towards me, full of love and confidence! But this misery was all from my impatience; if I could but have

waited a few hours longer, how much anguish should I have been spared ! But all is well ! all is well ! and now with tears of joy I tore in pieces the letter I had begun to write to him, and turned my whole attention to thinking over our approaching interview.

“ The happiest it will be that ever we have known ! ” I thought ; “ for now all will be explained.”

I persuaded myself that the first instant of our meeting would be that of candid acknowledgment on his part ; and, again the slave of fancy, I sat down with my watch in my hand to count the tedious moments. At last the time arrived—the weary hour were away. With more attention to appearances than since his absence I had thought of, I dressed myself to look well, and pleasing in his sight, and tried to chase away with smiles the traces which the morning’s grief had left upon my countenance ; and thus, with hope, too treacherous hope, fluttering in

my bosom, I hastened to the destined spot.

He was there before me ; but not as I had anticipated, did he, with joy corresponding to mine, seem to be eagerly watching for my arrival ; but, on the contrary, in the most dejected manner, he was leaning his head upon his hand as he stood by a gate, and appearing to be lost in melancholy abstraction ; an abstraction so deep that, till he heard my steps, he did not rouse from it.

Then, indeed, a gleam of pleasure lighted up his countenance ; but I saw that it was *but* a gleam, and my variable feelings sunk from their elevation. I know not well what I had precisely expected his greeting to be, but something different from—" Isabel, this is, indeed, most kind !" Still, for the first few minutes, I received him with cordial delight, for, as yet, it did not, even to my impatient, distorted mind, seem quite clear that he had no communication to

make, though it was not given in the same breath with which he welcomed me, as I had, no doubt, expected.

But when I found him proceeding in a strain which betokened ardent pleasure indeed, in our meeting, but nothing like elucidation, or the slightest reference to the terrible report I had heard, all my former fears of being deceived returned with tenfold force, agitating me so terribly, that, as I leaned upon his arm, he perceived the trembling of my frame.

“ My dear Isabel !” he said, “ what is the matter ?” and, alarmed by the paleness of my countenance as he looked anxiously in my face, whilst he made the inquiry, “ what is the matter ?” he repeated.

Never in my life had I made such an effort of self-control, as that which restrained me, when he asked me this, from answering, “ Your perfidy it is that kills me !” but I struggled till

cold drops stood upon my forehead—I struggled to be silent. I was obliged to sit down upon a bank that was near us ; for these repeated attacks upon my feelings were more than I could support.

“ Tell me, dearest, I beseech you to tell me, what affects you thus ?” he incessantly inquired of me, as he hung over me with the fondest attention ; but I would not be any longer misled by his tenderness. I *would* be firm—ah ! too confident—too dependent upon my erring feeble powers ! Now, indeed, had I prayed, it might have been well ! but I thought that I was strong and sufficient for myself, and as soon as I grew more composed, I rose and proposed to resume our walk.

He looked at me with an earnest and penetrating eye. It was quite manifest to him, that I was not myself. It was not like me, thus coldly to repel his notice—thus decidedly to intrench myself

in reserve—thus evidently to labour at subduing some strong emotion—No, this was not natural to me. Still he chose not to notice it directly : at least, such was the construction I put upon his remaining silent for a short time after we resumed our walk. “ He sees something strange in me,” I said to myself ; “ he must see that !” But he will not inquire into it. No : that would lead to an explanation, and that he clearly wishes to avoid ! To avoid ! what the very circumstance I supposed him most anxious should occur ! and so he would have been anxious for it, if he had an honourable purpose in view ; but he has not ! all is too intelligible ! all is too well explained ! But I will undeceive him before we part ! yes—yes ; we will not continue thus playing upon each other. *I* will be candid, at least : but, gently—I will do it gently—calmly—patiently. “ Oh, yes ! I will be quite calm.”

At length these incongruous meditations were interrupted by his addressing me.

“ You cannot think,” he said, “ how tired every body has been of me, since I have been away. You spoil me, Isabel, for all other society.”

“ Do I?” was my only reply ; but I attempted a smile, and he went on.

“ If I could have spoken of you, I should have been eloquent, and then, perhaps, I might have been agreeable ; but having only one thought to utter, and nobody to understand it, I was obliged to be silent.”

“ If this one thought had been very solicitous for communication,” I could not forbear to say, “ I should have supposed that, in the course of three weeks, it would have tempted you to direct your attention to the object of it.”

“ If I had been able to have addressed you exactly as I could have wished,”

he replied, gravely, " I should not have drawn upon myself your reproof."

" I dare say not," said I, with as much calmness as I could assume, which was little indeed ; for the tempest that raged in my soul every moment increased in force as my conviction of his treachery appeared to be more and more justified by his present behaviour.

" But the moment of explanation, though protracted, is not now far distant," said he, with a sort of proud submission which seemed to resent my dissatisfaction, as conveying an indirect doubt of his honour, quite insupportable to him ; a pretended resentment—for such I thought it—which disarmed me at once of all my self-possession, all my previous resolutions, all my hardly-acquired patience."

" No: it is not now far distant," I said, with my heart beating terribly ; " it is at hand—it is come."

He fixed upon me a most expressive look, but did not speak.

“Yes, it is come!” I repeated, with undissembled anger; my overwhelming passions rushing upon their victim at once, and making me their unhappy slave. “The explanation *is* made, Leslie, and I am undeceived. Yes; do not wonder—do not look at me with so much astonishment: truth *will* make its way; it *will* reach the ears of even those from whom we labour to disguise it. It will—it will, you see!”

“What can this mean!” he said, with, what I concluded to be well affected surprise, “what can you mean? Surely, Isabel, you must have lost your senses?”

“No, rather say that I have but just found them,” I replied; “I lost them indeed when I believed that a man, who began his addresses to me with a request they might be concealed, *could* mean me honourably; I lost them

when, for three months he was avowedly mysterious with me, and still I believed that he intended me well. I lost them when, for three weeks together while he was absent from me, he never could address to me one word of remembrance, and still I depended upon his faith and constancy. But now, Leslie, I have found them, for now I know that you are deceiving me—I *know* it.”

“ You know it !” he repeated, “ you know it !”

“ Yes I know it ! what need of this frivolous repetition of my words ? you have nothing to say—let it pass—you have nothing to say !”

“ I must say, that I think you are distracted !”

“ Perhaps so ! very likely ! I don’t know any thing more likely to distract a sensitive and affectionate heart, than to find itself deceived where it had reposed the most undoubting confidence !”

“ And how have I deceived you? how have I betrayed your confidence?”

“ By plighting your affections to me, when they were before pledged to another.”

His countenance underwent an evident change as I said this; surprise was visible in every feature; still he maintained a composure of manner which irritated me to the very verge of distraction.

“ But again, perhaps, I am testifying the loss of my senses!” I proceeded; “ again you will tell me I am distracted; doubtless I am dreaming! no such thing has ever occurred; you never spoke of love to any but me; you will tell me this—beyond all question you will tell me this, to cajole me yet a little longer!”—My vehemence compelled me to pause, of which he took advantage to speak.

“ I do not tell you this,” he said, with a calmness which made no part of his character, and which I do not believe he

would have felt, if my violence had not given him time to collect all his powers, and, in fact, invested him with that advantage which the most erring creatures, while self-possessed, will ever obtain even over those who have truth on their side, when the latter unfortunately suffer themselves to be governed by passion.

“ I do not tell you this,” he said.

“ Indeed ! you acknowledge it then !” I replied ; “ you acknowledge that you have deceived and trifled with me—that you selected me as a fit subject for the gratification of your vanity !—that—”

“ I make no such acknowledgment,” said he, interrupting me ; he would have added more, but I had not patience to wait for it. He had tacitly confessed to my face, that the worst part of my suspicions of him were true, and every moment that I staid with him after that, seemed a degradation too humiliating to be borne.

“ No, you would not do that,” I said :

“ that would be carrying candour a great way indeed ! It is sufficient that all is told which it behoved me to hear. I know that you were under an engagement to another when you solicited my hand. I know that you have deceived me— what need I know more than that ? ”

“ You do not know it ! ” he replied, with great indignation, for now his temper was roused, and he appeared determined to defend himself. “ I know not what you have heard, and I care not. ”

“ I dare say not, ” said I, interrupting him again with the utmost scorn, “ why should you care ? What is a woman’s love ! what signifies a woman’s heart ! if it is distressed, or wounded, or broken, what matter ? It serves to swell a triumph ; and when it is talked of in your presence, you have only to say, poor Isabel Melville ! Ah poor girl ! I was sorry she had fixed her affections so extravagantly upon me !

The matter will no doubt pass off thus ; and what have *you* to care for ?”

“ God give me patience with you, Isabel !” he said—and I believe with sincerity enough, for I suppose I might have passed the bounds of being endured with any kind of composure. But my very soul was overwhelmed with the intensity of my various passions, and I scarcely could be called in the possession of my senses.

“ Give *you* patience !” I said ; “ ’tis I that should intreat for patience ! Humbled, and injured, and deceived, and insulted as I am !” and I felt the tears, which indignation had hitherto restrained, now rising to my eyes, and threatening every moment to burst forth ; a sight I would not have exhibited to him—no, not for any consideration that could have been named to me. Yet if I staid another instant I knew it must be so—yes—oh yes—for he took my hand !

“ Isabel, for God’s sake, be composed!” he said.

“ Composed ! how can you speak to me of composure ? Have you not broken my heart ? have you not— ” But no more—I rushed away from him. I would not stay to let him see, in the agony that oppressed me, how dreadful was the devastation he had made of my happiness.

I heard him pronounce my name once or twice in a tone of intreaty, but I would not listen ; I hurried from him, as if destruction was in his presence ; and never did I pause till I arrived, I scarcely knew how, at my uncle’s door.

I hastened to my own room : I shut —I bolted the door ; and, on my knees, I tried to pray—but I could not ! human passion had the full possession of me, and my soul was too much unsubdued for prayer. Amidst the tide of feelings that overwhelmed me, I was most of all distressed by the remem-

brance of my own impetuosity, which had prevented me from reaping the only advantage this wretched interview could have afforded, in drawing from Leslie the confession I had so long and so eagerly desired respecting his real situation.

“ Oh ! fool, fool that I am ! ” I incessantly repeated ; “ when shall I learn wisdom ? when shall I obtain common-sense ? Never—never ! These tremendous feelings !—Oh ! why was I born ? ” And then the bursting tears a little relieved the fulness of my labouring breast. The intensity of my sufferings made me pitiable even to myself ! I could not forbear to believe that He who made me thus, would look upon me with compassion, and, with softer emotions, again I bent my knees before him, and besought His aid—though not with words, for I had none ! I did but lift my wounded spirit in the mournful intreaty of heart-breaking sighs and sobs, that drowned

every faint attempt I made for utterance. I felt an instinctive assurance, that the refuge I sought was my all, though I knew not how to seek it aright. A still but awful voice within me, though fiercely resisted by the clamour of outrageous passion, assured me that I was myself the source of all my wretchedness ; and that some transformation, far beyond my feeble efforts to produce, must be wrought in me, before any thing like peace could be my portion. Yes—even in this hour of noise, and fury, and earth-born corruption, I heard and trembled at the voice of conscience—the voice of God !

“ Oh, teach me !” I said ; “ forgive, and teach me !”

The words were few, but they assuredly rose from my inmost soul ; and, though the supplication was not immediately answered, I am well persuaded it was treasured up in heaven.

CHAP. VI.

MISS DELMOND WRITES.

They also serve, who only stand and wait.

MILTON.

I MUST here pause to remark, in relation to this subject of prayer, that Christians are too apt to fancy their petitions are not accepted, if not speedily answered. We offer them up, and we rise from our knees, and too commonly forget the subject for which we have intreated, even though it may have been with the sincerest fervour; more especially if some little time elapses, and we experience not the desired blessing: whereas it may be months, and even years, before it is bestowed. The answer to our

prayer, if withheld, is not forgotten; but, if earnestly sought, and it is fit for us to receive, it never fails to come in God's good time, in which a thousand years are but as yesterday.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

I WAS far too much disturbed and agitated to attend the tea-table. I had no resource to escape it but the usual resort of Miss Russell's dwelling, to which I repaired without loss of time, for fear of being prevented by any message from below. In doing this, I was increasing the dissatisfaction both of my uncle and aunt, who did not approve of this extreme intimacy, to the neglect of all my domestic duties and attentions to them. But, as one wrong step infallibly involves a great many more, my connexion with Leslie had paved the way to this indiscretion, or at least to its

subsisting in a far greater degree than it would have done otherwise. And these visits were never beneficial to me; for Miss Russell was a worldly counsellor, and my unhappy case required to be guided by the wisdom which was from above. But she did her best for me. What that best was, may be gathered from our conversation, which, as soon as we had resorted to her room, and were quite free from interruption, I introduced by relating, in a manner scarcely to be called intelligible, from the excess of my emotions, the scene which had taken place with Leslie—of whose return she heard, of course, with the utmost astonishment.

“What can you think of it, Elizabeth?” I said, when I had finished what I had to relate; “what *can* you think of him? Can you believe that he has any thing to say in vindication of himself?”

She inquired what he had already

said, which, I was obliged to confess, my violence and impatience had reduced to nothing.

“ But, doubtless, he had nothing to advance.”—I went on, in much anxiety, to relieve myself from the folly of having been the obstacle in the way of deriving the only satisfaction that remained to me,—“ what *could* he have to say, you know, Elizabeth, after he had acknowledged that what I accused him of was true?”

“ Why, we don’t know,” she replied ; “ he might have been able to prove that it was an entanglement against his wishes; or, he might——”

“ Oh! don’t—don’t tell me this!” I exclaimed, bursting into tears.

“ Well—but,” said she, willing to soothe me, “ if he has any thing to say in his justification, you will still hear it. If he sincerely loves you, he will not part with you thus.”

“ I think not,” I eagerly exclaimed, full of joy to find she had fixed upon a suggestion which, since my wretched parting with Leslie, I had been incessantly clinging to for comfort. “ Oh, no !” I continued, “ he surely would not part with me thus ! *You* do not think he would, Elizabeth ?”

She repeated her conviction that he would not.

“ But, still,” I went on, “ if he is *actually* engaged to another woman ! What *can* be said to justify such a case as that ?”

She mused a little while before she spoke.

“ He might happen to be engaged to her before he saw you, and, after that time, he found his affections transferred to you.”

“ Oh ! but, if that should be the case, how could I listen to addresses from a man who must have acted perfidiously, in entering into an engagement with one

woman, while he was still under a similar engagement with another? How *could* I, Elizabeth?"

Again she paused.

" 'To be sure,' said she, " your *knowing* that he had acted thus, would subject you to a great deal of censure from the world in accepting him. What a pity that you did know it! No doubt, Leslie was desirous to have kept it from you till he had entirely broken it off."

I thought I should have lost my senses, as this sad conviction became clearer and clearer to us both, the more we mused upon it.

" However," said she, after a long discussion, " I don't see why people are to suppose that you knew of his being engaged when he offered himself to you."

" I did not know it," I said, eagerly.

" No, to be sure," said she ; " no more you did ! Well, well, that settles the whole question, then. Make yourself

easy: all will be explained, and, perhaps, you will be ten times more happy together than ever you have been yet.—Perhaps, did I say? Nay, it is more than a perhaps—you certainly will; for, no mystery remaining, you will mutually talk of your future plans, and I shall see you his happy wife by this time twelvemonth.”

“ My dear Elizabeth !” said I, returning with fervour the embrace with which she congratulated me upon this delightful prospect, “ you are my best comforter ! What should I do without you ? But then, my dear, this unhappy girl, to whom he is engaged !”

“ You have nothing to do with her,” she replied ; “ you are not supposed to know any thing about her.”

“ Ah ! but I *do* know ! I could not comfort myself with the idea of not being supposed to know any thing about her, when the fact of her misery would be haunting me night and day.”

“ Not the *fact!*” and she smiled. “ She might be very glad to get rid of him, for any thing you know; at any rate, it would be as well to suppose it.”

“ Ah! but could *I* suppose that, Elizabeth? It must be some other person, and not me, who can suppose that any woman would do otherwise than mourn, even to the grave, the loss of such a man as Leslie. I know too well what it is to love him; not to feel the deepest sympathy and commiseration for her who loves him without hope of a return.”

“ Well, but, if he does not love her, you can’t make him, you know. Let her alone, whoever she may be; you have nothing to do with her.”

“ Nothing more than to do as I would be done by; nothing more than to fulfil the duty which one fellow-creature owes to another. I must not be blind to this, Elizabeth; I must not be callous to the

common feelings of humanity. Alas! this unhappy attachment has already made me selfish enough—already blinded me too much to every duty—every claim! God grant that it may ever turn out well!”

“ You are such a self-tormentor, Isabel!” she said. “ Now, just when every difficulty appears to vanish, and you have the brightest hopes breaking in upon you, why should you create evils to distress you?”

“ I need not do that,” said I, yielding to her remarks; “ I am sure I need not do that. But the fact is, I have an unhappy mind, which never will let me rest in security. However, as you say, I will not think about this nameless person I so much dread—at any rate till I know more about her; and I surely shall—don’t you think I shall? He surely will seek me in some shape or other!”

She interrupted me by again testify-

ing, in the most positive manner, her conviction that the matter could not end thus, and once more I was the victim of hope and expectation.

CHAP. VII.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

It's good to be off with the old love,
Before ye be on with the new.

Old Ballad.

BUT it was only for a short time. My way was made clear by a letter, which, on my return home from Miss Russell, was put into my hands by Mary, who told me that Mr. Leslie had brought it himself, not more than half an hour before. My uncle and aunt were gone to bed, and I had no impediment to hinder me from hastening up-stairs, and sitting down immediately to peruse, or rather to devour, the following lines :

“ I should not have left it to chance,

Isabel, to make you acquainted with my real situation, had I not entertained the most sanguine expectation that, long ere this, I could myself have explained to you the circumstances which compelled me to solicit your indulgent acquiescence in my desire of concealing our engagement. That desire being now fruitless, I have only to throw myself upon your generosity, whilst I make you a faithful relation of such parts of my story as have hitherto been withheld from you. To make myself intelligible, I must entreat your patience if I advert, in the first instance, to what may seem irrelevant to the point. You will soon perceive how fatally my errors are connected together! You have heard me frequently speak in terms of the highest respect of my guardian, Mr. Sutton, in whose care I was left an orphan at a very early age. You have also heard me relate the grief it occasioned him, when, in a fit of passionate resentment, for what I considered

an unwarranted usurpation of authority in one of the college dignitaries, in punishing me for a slight offence, I so far forgot my subordinate station at the University, as to testify my feelings in a manner which occasioned my dismissal from it. But you have never heard me speak of the heaviest sorrow of all, which it was—and, alas! must ever be—to my shame to have occasioned this excellent man.

“ As he was unmarried, you would not have expected, perhaps, to hear that my heart was in danger, during the vacations I used to pass at his house, from the society of any young ladies that might be assembled around him. But before I went to college, I had been too much pleased with the beauty of his niece, Matilda Sutton, who, with her mother, generally spent a part of the summer with him. She was exceedingly pretty—very young—very gentle—and, altogether, a sort of girl who, without

exciting any enthusiastic passion in my mind, it was impossible otherwise than to love. Still it never occurred to me that any thing serious would be expected to follow our mutual pleasure in each others society. She was only sixteen : I was only eighteen ; and, in fact, I supposed it was clearly understood to be nothing more, on both sides, than the attachment of a boy and girl, who looked upon each other in the light of a brother and sister.

“ It was not till I took leave of her for the university, that I had any cause to suspect the strong interest I had awakened in her heart ; but her emotion upon that occasion betrayed it all. I will not say that I was otherwise than gratified to discover it : for I believe there are few young men who could have been indifferent to the affection of a girl so attractive as she was. With the ardour of my character, I vowed her instantly eternal constancy : I sought,

and without difficulty obtained, a ready promise of her hand, as soon as I was of age; and, in short, every thing was openly acknowledged and approved of by her friends, and we became henceforth engaged to each other. But absence, which removes the veil from many a lover's eye, soon taught me that Matilda was not altogether the woman I could wish to marry. I loved her very dearly; but it was more as I would have loved a sister. The woman I would have made my wife, I wished to possess a totally different character. Genius—spirit—talent—accomplishment. Ah! Isabel! need I describe to you the woman who might command my most devoted adoration! But, for my poor Matilda, she had charms, indeed, to win and keep the heart of many, perhaps of most young men—but not mine. Her unvarying sweetness of temper and acquiescent spirit fatigued me; I knew always what I had to expect

from her : nothing new—nothing but what, indeed, was very lovely, but insipid—tame. To be brief, my letters became short, languid, *I* should think, stupid : still she saw it not. I found her confidence in my attachment so determined, that nothing short of an open avowal of its being diminished, would have produced such an idea in her mind. Thus we went on till the summer brought on our meeting ; and then, in the renewal of intimacy, I experienced a brief renewal of affection. But, again, it faded away under the influence of absence, and, weary of this variation of mind, and satisfied that I never could return in any proportionate degree the love she bore me, I resolved to break off our connexion at once. Here, you will doubtless shrink from me with detestation ; be it so. I admit that I deserve it ; but still, Isabel, you must allow I decided properly in not continuing a connexion, which even before marriage

was distasteful to me. I communicated my sentiments, not to her, but to Mr. Sutton; whom I charged with a commission to make them known to her, and added, with truth, that the affection of the fondest brother I should ever feel for her, and know of no happiness so pure and complete as that of being serviceable to her. To this communication Mr. Sutton merely replied by informing her, that he had executed my wishes, of the propriety of which I, of course, could only judge. He only thought it unfortunate that I had not endeavoured to ascertain them at an earlier stage of the affair.

“ I could see that he was exceedingly dissatisfied with me, though as I was a young man of fortune, and the person interested in the matter was one who stood very nearly related to him, he evidently felt it too delicate an affair to take any very active part in.

“ I did not feel disposed to make my

usual visit to his house during the vacation immediately succeeding this rupture; but the unfortunate termination of my college career at length drove me an unwilling guest to the mansion of my good old friend.

“ It was some months since we met, and I was shocked to perceive him quite broken down in appearance; his good looks gone—his spirits gone—and nothing but the wreck of his former self remaining.

“ He welcomed me with calm and civil kindness; the disgrace with which I appeared before him, indeed, independently of any other consideration, prevented any very great cordiality on his part.

“ For some days our time was chiefly occupied in talking over what had passed, and arranging my future plans. I had many thoughts of poor Matilda, but I dared not make any inquiries respecting her. At last, one morning at breakfast,

a letter came for him, which he opened, and read with so much visible emotion, that I could not forbear to ask him, “if it brought him any bad news?”

“He directed no answer to me, but only exclaiming, ‘Poor child! poor child!’ He folded the letter up and put it in his pocket.

“I knew from his manner that his pity related to Matilda, and I could no longer refrain from mentioning her name.

“‘You had better not ask after her,’ he said; ‘it will be for your interest to hear as little about her as may be.’

“Such a reply, of course, did not make me less urgent in my inquiries, which at length brought from him the sad acknowledgment, that ever since my breaking with her she had been declining in health, and that the letter he had just received was from her mother, to say, the physicians had now no hope whatever, if a visit she was on the point of making to Clifton should fail to revive her.

“ ‘ They do not know,’ said he, ‘ that it is at the heart!—the heart!—poor child!’

“ Do you think I could remain passive, Isabel, while I had a hope of giving comfort to this suffering girl, and her widowed mother, and her poor old uncle, that loved her like a father! I hurried off without loss of time to her residence—I saw her—I renewed my offers:—she was revived to a degree that seemed to indicate, as the old man said, that the *heart* had been the seat of her disorder. She daily got better, and I tried to make myself happy in believing that I contributed to make her happy. While I was with her, I cannot say that I repined at our connexion, for her invariable gentleness and amiable qualities captivated me exceedingly, and I hoped I should be so sensible of their value as to render our wedded life a mutual blessing. I was recommended by Mr. Sutton to continue my studies with his friend, Mr.

Hodson, till I came of age, when my marriage with Matilda was to take place. Oh, Isabel ! what need I now add to my story ? You know the rest ; you know that the first moment I saw you, my heart acknowledged you as the very being formed to constitute the idol of its fondest affections. But my situation with Matilda precluded my declaring the passion with which you had inspired me. I soon found that my acquaintance with you had totally destroyed the sort of pleasure I had hitherto found in her society. I resolved once more to break off an engagement more than ever adverse to my inclinations ; but the consideration due to Matilda required that it should be done with caution. In the meantime, my fear of losing you, and my ardent desire to secure you for my own, prompted my declaration before I was warranted to make it. I left D —, with a hope of returning to you free to acknowledge my attachment in the

face of the world ; but the unexpected death of Matilda's mother, not only prevented my fulfilling my intentions at this time, but claimed from me the attention of a visit to her in the hours of her affliction. Under these circumstances I could not follow the dictates of my heart, which would have led me to write to you, as all the pleasure which absence permitted me to enjoy.

“ Thus, Isabel, I have been candid with you ; I know not what I have to expect from you ; I throw myself upon your compassion—upon your love. But whatever be your decision, mine is irrevocable. I cannot marry Matilda. I must hope and believe that such a determination, on my part, will not be ultimately of very serious consequences to her peace. I have just ground for believing, that both Mr. Sutton and myself were much deceived as to the sole cause and extent of the indisposition which was said to be occasioned by my inconstancy. I do

not mean that Matilda herself connived at misleading me, for I believe her to be simplicity itself ; but her mother was an artful character. I clearly saw that it was always an object with her to gain me for her daughter, and I have no hesitation in saying, that she took advantage of Matilda's falling into delicate health to magnify her illness, and to attribute it solely to grief occasioned by my misconduct. But she is gone, and I will not reproach her memory. That Matilda will suffer deeply I cannot hide from myself ; and that I must suffer in the reproaches of my own conscience, for having caused her so much sorrow, I well know ; but she will suffer less under her present circumstances than she would as my unhappy wife—I cannot do her the injustice to marry her ; no, I will not.

“ Once more, then, Isabel, I cast myself upon your generosity—your love for me. I will not believe that it will be

in vain—let me hope for your propitious, your speedy reply; and let our next interview be one of unmixed enjoyment and mutual confidence, not of angry reproach and scornful recrimination. Yet, under every mood of mind, to me so dear are you, that I would rather undergo your reproof, however severe, however cutting, in the certainty that my devoted attachment to you must plead for my forgiveness, than that you should withhold from me any of the sentiments with which this relation may have inspired you. Say all then, dearest Isabel! say every thing you think of my conduct; but do not say you will be any thing but what you ever have been, the dearest, the most beloved, the affianced wife of your own

“EDWARD LESLIE.”

Oh! the selfishness, the dreadful selfishness of love!—My first emotions on concluding this letter were those of un-

mixed happiness. I thought only of myself—only of the long and anxious situation of suspense which was now entirely removed. I then contemplated, with rapturous delight, the ardent passion he avowed for me—his desire of testifying it, by the dishonorable lengths to which he was willing it should betray him, did not fill me with any kind of detestation ; but, on the contrary, only served to swell the triumph of my heart at perceiving him so completely my captive ;—such was the first impression his letter produced. But soon came other thoughts—other feelings ; the result of my better nature. I was an enthusiast beset with strong affections, which commonly misled and governed me ; and so far I was selfish enough. But I was not cruel ; I was not hard-hearted ; I could not contemplate the sorrows which I was about to combine in accumulating upon the head of this unhappy Matilda, without a pang of remorse almost insupportable

—a pang which, in the stillness of solitude at the hour of midnight, was more peculiarly acute; for then it is that worldly feelings and worldly attachments *will* betray their nothingness, and in the eye of reason fade away, like the departed day, of which no trace remains, however bright and beautiful it dawned upon us.

“And in a few short years,” I said, “my day must come to a close, and I must sleep the sleep of death!—of what avail will it then be that I have followed every desire of my heart, and spared no trouble to obtain what I call happiness here? What will it *then* signify whether I have been the wife of Leslie or not?—but how much may it avail that I have studied to have a conscience void of offence; that I have wilfully done no wrong, and caused no sorrow to any fellow-creature!—how much may this avail!—how much *must* it avail if there be truth and justice in the promises of God! But such a sacrifice!—such a sacrifice as

this,—” and alarmed at the lengths to which I had been led in even *thinking* about making it, I instantly drew back.

“Oh, no!” I said, “I could not give up Leslie! I am not called upon to do it! I surely am not!” and I endeavoured to find comfort in all Miss Russell had said upon the subject—in all that Leslie himself had said.

“He will not marry her!” I said, “of what service then would be my inflicting upon myself this useless sacrifice! I am to blame to tease myself thus; I am a self-tormentor, as Elizabeth says; I will not be thus weak—I will be happy!” and in this determination I sought my pillow. But in the broken visions of the night I found no peace; if for an instant I lost myself in sleep, I saw the unhappy Matilda before me weeping—broken-hearted—pale—dying! I repeatedly started up, and woke myself with exclamations of grief. At the first dawn of day I left my bed, and endeavoured,

for a little while, to escape from the subject, by trying if I could occupy my mind with reading ; but as well might I have hoped to escape from existence, as from the one absorbing, agitating thought which racked me with indecision. I well knew that to follow the dictates of honour, of propriety, of every amiable, of every respectable feeling, I ought not to accept the hand of Leslie, whilst it was tendered to me under his present circumstances ; and my knowledge of his proud and haughty spirit made me shrink from the great probability of his withdrawing himself in pique, and never renewing his addresses at all, if, after so passionate an appeal to my affection, and so candid an explanation as he had made, I resolved upon rejecting him.

“ What can I do !—What *can I do* ? ”
 I said, as in the perturbation of my soul I paced up and down my room ; “ and when and where will my disquiet end !
 This explanation for which I so much

panted, what has it brought me ! Oh, what has it brought me !” and I cast myself upon my bed, and sobbed, till I wondered how I lived under the intensity of my anguish. I wondered that my heart did not break at once beneath the weight of continual agitation and excitement which threatened to destroy me.

Nature at length, wholly exhausted, obtained a little respite, for I fell asleep, and when I woke my mind was somewhat composed, and more capable of connected thought. I wished to do right—I had not much difficulty in discovering what line of conduct I must then pursue ; but I wanted strengthening in my better purposes ; my heart sunk at the contemplation of what I feared must be required of me. I *feared*, I say, for I did not quite despair. I was not quite without hope that this tremendous sacrifice might not be demanded ; but who should tell me that it would not, that it ought not to be demanded, if I—

I, the person most interested, most blinded by love, and upon every account the most likely to judge for the gratification of my own wishes—if I paused, and doubted, and believed I was called upon to oppose them?

Miss Russell, I knew, would tell me I need not to oppose them; but could I believe Miss Russell? Did I not know her to be a sophist—a mere pretender, upon every matter that required the exercise of high and elevated feeling? She could talk indeed, and ring the changes upon fine sentiments and fine words, and impose upon herself, and upon me when I was willing to be imposed upon; but I knew and felt in my inmost soul, that if I wished for good counsel, dictated in a spirit of honest simplicity, by which I hoped to find my dark and devious path enlightened, Miss Russell was not the person I was now to seek. I thought of my aunt; but her tenderness! her pity for my sufferings!—I wept to think of

what she would feel in advising any thing that was to cause me so much misery.

“No, not my aunt!” I said aloud, “she is already sufficiently unhappy about me! There *was* one whose idea had long been uppermost with me as the best of counsellors; but I had recoiled from seeking her, because I foresaw at once what *she* would have to say. I had no sophistry, no involved meaning, no calculations to expect from Miss Delmond; she would come straight to the point; she would say in three words all I had to do—and could I support this simplicity of reasoning? But, perhaps, she might be more indulgent than I expected! Oh, if she would!—Still, whatever it might dictate, I could not but believe that her counsel would be more valuable than that of any other person; for I was certain I might safely walk by any rule she gave me—and after all, when she heard my story, she might not be so rigid as I feared. At all events I

thought that I would seek her, and see if any opportunity offered of disclosing my mind ; if it did, I would lay my heart open to her. The circumstances of my situation with Leslie, I had every reason to suppose she knew from the Russells, and the terms we were upon were such as to warrant my communicating any part of my affairs to her, without appearing to violate either the dictates of prudence or good taste.

But it was not without an agony of fear for what might be the result of our interview, that, very early in the day, I presented myself at the cottage of Miss Delmond.

CHAP. VIII.

 MISS DELMOND WRITES.

And is there aught on earth, or rich or rare,
 Whose pleasures may with Virtue's pains compare ?
 This fruit of patience—this the pure delight,
 That 'tis a trial in her Judge's sight :
 Her part still striving duty to maintain,
 Not spurning pleasure—not despising pain ;
 Never in triumph till her race be won,
 And never fainting till her work be done.

 CRABBE.

I SHALL here refer to my diary, and substitute my own recollections of this interview in the place of Isabel's. By an unusual chance we had not encountered each other at the Russells', and I had not seen her since the meeting between us, which I have already recorded. This estrangement gave me as much regret on her account, as on my own ; because I

felt assured that, after so much pleasing candour and docility of mind as she then manifested, she would not have indicated any thing like aversion from my society, if it had not been prompted by a consciousness that her conduct was at variance with the sentiments she then expressed. But, besides that the fervent hope I entertained of being permitted to be useful to her would have restrained me from betraying any resentment, I had been too long inured to the slight and contumely which commonly fall to the share of an indigent and unprotected woman, not to have acquired such habits of patience, as upon most occasions of provocation sufficed to keep me passive. The uselessness of resentment, on the part of the helpless, might perhaps have alone supplied a motive for this quiescence ; but, I thank God, I had a better : for, amidst all my injuries, whatever was their kind or degree, I thought of one sure moment in which

I should have the reward of forbearance. I thought of my dying hour—"And when I shall then look back upon the past," I used to say, "my solicitude will not be about what persons did to me, but what I did to them: I shall have no care what insult or unkindness they heaped upon me, but how I sustained the weight of it." Thus fortified, I was not long of silencing by a smile, and with an extended hand, the words of apology with which Miss Melville began to excuse so small an offence as she had committed. "I fear," she said, "that you *must*, in spite of your determination to think the best of every body, have felt a little displeasure against me. To see me so careless of your friendship, after you had so kindly interested yourself in me—what can you think of me?"

"I have thought just this—to be sure this is not very flattering, but then it is only too natural: she finds Miss Russell

a more entertaining companion than I am—" she quickly interrupted me. "If you had seen me that day, you would not have thought it was entertainment I was seeking in admitting Miss Russell. I don't know who or what could have been entertaining to me!"

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that—I am very sorry," I said, perceiving the strong effort she made to restrain emotions, which, after all, would not be restrained; for, after a fruitless attempt, first to speak, and then to smile through her tears, as if she would have it pass as something to be laughed at that she should be thus overcome, apparently for nothing—nature would have its way, and, sitting down in the chair that first offered itself, she hid her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

I would have soothed her, but she would not be soothed. "You must not speak so kindly," she said with heavy

sobs ; “ I want strength—strength—you must give it me.”—“ It is God alone that can give you that, my dear,” I said.

“ It is indeed !” she said, rising from her seat, and for a little interval walking away from my endearments and compassion, and trying to compose herself sufficiently to tell me what so terribly disturbed her. She returned, and resumed her seat.

“ I want a friend,” she said, “ a real friend—I come to you. If I presume too much in intruding my troubles upon you, do not hesitate to say so.”

I interrupted her with the most fervent and sincere assurances of sympathy in all she chose to communicate. “ I must seem abrupt,” she continued ; “ but I cast myself upon your known goodness. You know, perhaps, of my—my—connexion with— ”

“ With Mr. Leslie !” I added, to relieve her great embarrassment ; “ I understand from the Russells that an

engagement subsists between you, though at present it is a thing not to be talked of."

" Ah ! when will it be to be talked of?" she said ; then, as quickly as she had spoken the words, replying to them, " never—never ! he never will be mine —oh Miss Delmond, he never will be mine !"

I cannot say that such a declaration surprised me, inasmuch as, from the manner in which the affair had been carried on, I never supposed that it was likely to terminate in marriage ; neither could I, as the warm admirer, and the well-wisher of Miss Melville, be very ardent in my hopes that it would. Mr. Leslie, though one of the most fascinating of men, was too undisciplined, in temper and conduct, to make him a desirable husband for one who stood so much in need of a judicious counsellor as my unhappy young friend. Nevertheless, I could not do otherwise than

feel very deeply for the agony of spirit in which she pronounced a conviction so painful to her. I inquired into the circumstances which occasioned it.

She gave me a brief but clear statement of her situation, concluding it by offering to my perusal the letter he had sent her the preceding night.

“ While you read and consider it,” she said, “ I will return home, and endeavour to school my mind to bear what you may have to say upon it. Only, dear Miss Delmond, if you can be favourable to my wishes—if you can——”

“ Tell me, my dear Isabel,” I said ; “ tell me, before I read this letter, if you are really desirous to hear my candid opinion upon what measures it should induce you to adopt? Because, I would rather let the matter end here, and give no opinion at all, than be reduced to the alternative of, perhaps, giving you severe pain.”

“ I wish you to read it,” she said,

“ and to tell me exactly what you think I ought to do in consequence of it. Only, as I said before, if you have a doubt, turn it in my favour.”

She then departed, with a promise to seek me again in the afternoon, as I wished, upon every account, as she had thought proper to invest me with the authority of a counsellor, to give her such advice as might have the advantage of a little consideration.

But, on reading Mr. Leslie's statement, I found it quite unnecessary to avail myself of the time I had requested to consider it. Nothing more clearly testified to me the power of love to transform one of the most honest and frank-hearted of beings into a character of an opposite kind, than to perceive that Isabel Melville had even paused, as to the line of conduct which justice to another, and propriety towards herself, demanded that she should now pursue. But I had no difficulty in excusing an

error thus committed, for well I knew what such a sacrifice must be to such a heart : and, as I thought of this, I looked forward to her return with a distress which words would faintly describe.

Most gladly would I have resigned the painful office she had allotted me ; most gladly would I have revived the anxious heart, and cheered the agitated countenance, with which, at the appointed hour in the evening, she again appeared before me. But I could not—I could only, for a few moments, indicate my sentiments by silence, when, more than once, she said, half-breathless with doubt and fear,—

“ What is it you think ? What is it you have to tell me ? ”

“ Nay, Isabel,” I at length replied, “ what is it you expect to hear ? You *could* have no doubt what my opinion must be.”

“ I feared, indeed, it would be unfavourable,” she said, with a low and

faltering voice ; “ but I still thought, perhaps, you might see the matter differently.”

“ There can be but one way for an honest mind to see it in, my dear,” said I, “ and that is, with reference to what duty requires of you ; and, seeing it in that light, can I give you any other counsel than to renounce the overtures of Mr. Leslie—made, as they avowedly are, with injustice, and to the injury of another ?”

“ No, no !” she said, in momentary petulance, “ you cannot certainly advise any thing else ; I was foolish to suppose you could : I might—nay, I was sure, what your advice would be before I asked it.”

“ And what made you sure of it, my dear Isabel,” I replied, “ but the conviction of your own judgment ? That I am certain is with me, however its dictates are opposed by your heart : tell me—is it not ?”

But she made no reply. In defiance of her good sense, her ardent imagination had, as usual, been misleading her; and I perceived that, instead of employing the interval which had passed in trying, as she had said she would, to school her mind to hear what I might have to say, she had given the reins to fancy, and came so persuaded of my acquiescence in all her wishes, that, on meeting with disappointment, she knew not how to support it with tolerable temper. But I had too much compassion for her not to bear with any symptoms of mortification she might exhibit—especially when the moment that gave them birth beheld their extinction; for she prevented my pursuing the subject, as I was about to do, in the way of mild expostulation, by yielding assent to all I had advanced.

“ Yet how difficult is my duty!” she said. “ Oh! Miss Delmond, it is impossible you can appreciate the thousandth part of what I have to struggle

with in making this sacrifice ; and, but that I hope——”

She was unwilling to acknowledge what she anticipated.

“ You hope that it will be but a temporary sacrifice,” I said ; “ and that Leslie will free himself from his present fetters, and return to you again !”

“ Is it unlawful to hope this ?” she replied. “ You must leave me something to feed upon—some prospect—some expectation ! You would not surely be so cruel as to bereave me of every thing at once !”

“ Nature will provide food for fancy and delusive hope, under all circumstances,” I said, “ whether I will permit it or not. I can say nothing, therefore, upon that point. Your business is with the present hour—the present case. Do but act right now, and you may leave the future to Him to whom alone it belongs. It has been beautifully and justly remarked, that ‘ duties are our’s—events

are God's!' With that principle to guide us, we need never be perplexed with various and conflicting feelings; we must——"

"Ah! pardon me," she said—"pardon me, for interrupting you; but this calm reasoning is too much for me. I am yet too little exercised in trial, to know well how to make it easy by unresisting submission. You cannot wonder if I would fain—fain ascertain, beyond the possibility of error, how far I am called upon to yield up every thing—yes, every thing that makes existence endurable to me; for, without Leslie, I can truly say, I have no wish to live another day—no, not another hour!" And, again, the rising agitation of her mind was painfully manifested by a fresh burst of sorrow.

I expected all this variation of feeling, all this inconsistency of opinion, from one who had not the blessing of fixed religious principle to guide her

path through life, and sustain her in the painful difficulties so certain to surround it. “ It is quite natural, my dear Isabel,” I said, “ that you should feel thus, and that you should at the present moment believe that life has not another charm, when you are deprived of the object so dear to you ; but very little experience will convince you of the fallacy of such an opinion. You will, perhaps, suffer more in kind and in degree than a mind fortified by religious feeling would suffer ; because you will not, I fear, be strengthened by those sublime emotions which, very frequently, to such a mind, will transform the hour of human suffering and sacrifice, into that of such holy resignation to the will of God—such complete and heavenly satisfaction in having it fulfilled at whatever cost of pain or endurance, and such perfect trust that the present affliction, which is but for a moment, will work out a far

more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, as renders it the consummation of a Christian's joy, and the foretaste of immortal happiness hereafter. Oh! Isabel! if these were your views, how ample a field of consolation would lie before you!—”

“ Oh! would, indeed, that they were my views,” she said, with much earnestness; “ would that God in his mercy would give me such a knowledge of himself as should elevate me above these wretched—wretched cares; these vain but torturing feelings! yet, though I see and loathe their nothingness—though I know by bitter experience where they lead me, I am powerless to oppose them. Oh! that my heart would break, and end their tyranny at once!”

But her excess of anguish impeded her further utterance, and for many minutes she sobbed upon my bosom with a violence which, one might have

almost believed, would have brought her sad existence to the termination she implored.

I never in my life witnessed such a specimen of the fearful agony which the victims of indulged passion may be called upon to endure ; and, whilst I shuddered at the spectacle, I silently lifted up my heart in supplication, that He, whose voice the winds and waves obey, would speak peace to the soul of this unhappy creature.

“ You may well look at me with such amazement,” she said, observing in my countenance some indication of my sentiments ; “ you know nothing of this fever of the soul ! Bless God that he has exempted you from it ! Don’t despise me—but bless him that he has made you differently.”

“ God forbid that I should despise you, or any one !” I said ; “ I feel for you, Isabel—I feel more than I can find words to express, and I know not what

it is that I would not do to serve you, and to make you happier. But I can only pray for you——”

I could not just then add any more, if more had been necessary to assure her of my deepest sympathy; but it was not. She took my hand and pressed it to her lips.

“ Good, good Miss Delmond,” she said; “ you will be of service to me! I want such a friend as you, for I have none: I never had a real friend, except, indeed, my dearest uncle and aunt; but they loved me too much. I must not be loved—I must not be too kindly treated—my heart will not bear it. No; it is too self-willed—too stubborn—adversity is best for it.”

She spoke in the hurried, unconnected manner, which usually accompanies strongly excited feeling; but, in the midst of her agitation, it was curious to remark how the force of a vigorous understanding predominated, and clearly

pointed out to her the sort of treatment which was most likely to subdue her mind, and bring it into that state of subjection, devoid of which, she felt there existed for her no moment of tranquillity. I so perfectly entered into, and approved her sentiments, that, much as my sympathy was excited, and willingly as I would have manifested it by the tenderest attentions, I forcibly restrained myself; and with all the calmness and composure I could command, I replied to her rapid observations, compelling myself to turn away, though with violence to my heart, from the deep and affecting sorrow with which she listened to me.

“ You have, indeed, no suitable friend, my dear Isabel,” I said; “ and the case would be to be lamented, if this privation, like every other, were not to be considered as a link in that chain, which, I trust, will unite you hereafter to real happiness. In permitting me to assume

the privilege of one, you afford me more pleasure than I believe it would now be in the power of any temporal circumstance to afford me. I will say no more upon that point; as your adviser, I can give you in the present instance but one counsel—which is, decidedly to reject the addresses of Mr. Leslie.”

“ Ah ! how easily is that said ! ” she exclaimed ; “ but pardon me, dear Miss Delmond ! I mean no reflection—bear with me if the vehemence of my spirit will sometimes betray itself in words ; only try to make me see the necessity of this sacrifice.”

“ You do not require that I should endeavour to convince such an understanding as your’s, Isabel,” I said ; “ but if you do, I would only ask you to put yourself in imagination in the place of Matilda.”

“ Ah ! if I do that—” she said.

“ And how can we any of us act

justly," said I, interrupting her, in my haste to seize the favourable moment for setting before her what it was evident her own sense of right had already suggested, "how can any of us act justly," I said, "but by attending to the counsels of that divine code, which in one sublime precept, 'do unto others as you would they should do unto you,' has embodied directions for every case? Taking this for your guide, I say again, Isabel, how could you support to know of the sorrow your acceptance of Leslie would occasion you to bring upon Matilda, the rightful possessor of his affections? How could you bear the reflections which would inevitably come when the first transports of your union had subsided, and you, perhaps, would have cause to know, that your happiness (supposing happiness to be your portion, which I doubt) how would you bear to find it was purchased with the ruined

peace—the broken health—the total sacrifice of another's comfort?"

She sighed heavily, and rose from her seat to take two or three turns about the room, clasping her hands repeatedly as she walked, and testifying in every movement the perturbation of her soul.

"You *must* make the sacrifice, my dear Isabel," I said; "wherefore, then, perplex and harass yourself by unnecessary deliberation?"

"I must make it," she said; "yes, I feel that I *must*." She here sat down, and after a few minutes' pause, during which her head was bent down upon her hand, she raised to mine her pale, pale face—than which no marble could be whiter.

"I know that I ought to do it—and I will!" she said.

"You will?" I said, with inexpressible joy at her compliance, so firmly, so unequivocally conveyed.

“ Yes,” she replied ; “ God helping me—I will !”

I did but just touch her hand with my lips, in the energy of my delight—but she withdrew it.

“ Don’t praise me—don’t soothe me !” she said ; “ you cannot conceive how I tremble at the thought of tenderness ; I am so weak ! so enervated ! but just now I seem to have an interval of strength ; I must make much of it, for I know that frail feeling will come again—I know that I must suffer !” She seemed to shudder in anticipating its sure return ; but again reviving, “ Now tell me,” she said, “ how I can best impart to Leslie my determination. I believe—” she paused.

“ You must not see him,” I said.

“ Not see him ?” she replied, with quickness ; “ I must *not* see him ?”

“ Indeed you must not,” said I ; “ it would endanger all your resolutions ; you

must upon no account see him—you must write.”

“But to part as we last parted!” said she; “Oh! Miss Delmond, it was such a shocking parting!—I could not leave him so!—I *must* see him once again—but once!”

“No, Isabel, not with my advice.”

“What! not for one poor five minutes—not just to say farewell?—Oh, you are too severe!”

I could have smiled, but that deep compassion restrained me, to observe how varying and long-indulged impulse maintained its sway, opposed as it was by uncommon strength and energy of mind.

“You bid me be severe, dear Isabel,” I said; “but I am not so. Believe me, if you can—but, ah! too well I know you cannot!—you cannot think me kind in urging you to refrain from seeing Leslie; yet I know I am your best of human

friends, in entreating you to see him no more. You say that you are resolved to make the sacrifice, and to renounce his hand—think well of it again :—are you so resolved ?”

“ Ah ! why cannot it be done at once—” she said, “ at once ! This lingering over it—” and again her tears interrupted her.

“ I find, indeed, that I must be severe with you, Isabel,” I said ; “ I must, though at the hazard of appearing harsh and unfeeling, remind you that this feebleness of purpose, this variation of mind, is totally unworthy of any reasonable being I forbear to use any higher plea than that of reason.”

“ But you must !” she said, in the agony of her heart, seizing my hand and grasping it with energy ; “ you *must* use a higher plea, for reason can do nothing for a grief like mine—you must speak to me of a God who sees my struggles, and who will look upon me with pity, and

hear my prayers, and help and comfort me !”

“ That, most assuredly, can I do, my poor child !” I said. “ He does look upon you with pity, Isabel ; He *will* hear your prayers ; He will comfort, He will sustain you in this terrible conflict ! Do but seek his aid fervently, constantly—and doubt not that you will have it.”

She was soothed by these words ; her impatience passed away ; and, after a little interval of indulgence to her emotions, she spoke with more calm firmness than she had yet exhibited.

“ I have said that I will make the sacrifice,” she said, “ and I will. I believe that I can now promise to make it in any way you think most advisable.”

“ Then let it be in as simple and short a way as possible, my dear !” I replied. “ Once having ascertained what is right to be done upon trying occasions, our safe adherence to duty is only to be found in performing it with the most per-

fect simplicity and promptitude. Such is the deceitfulness of the heart, that we can never be aware of the dangers into which it may betray us, even when it seems to enlist itself on the side of reason. You, doubtless, think it quite reasonable that you should indulge in a parting interview with Leslie: but, Isabel, you say that you are weak—that you have need of being treated with severity rather than tenderness; so much are you in the power of those feelings which are more peculiarly excited by kindness and affection. How can you then wish to trust yourself with an object so fondly beloved—so dangerous as Leslie? If your whole strength of mind, your whole energy of purpose, is faint and feeble to oppose the workings of your heart, how would you retain your just, your honourable and good intentions, against a man whose every power of fascination and tenderness would, you well know, be exerted to turn you from it.”

“ Oh, no! I could not—I know that

I could not," she replied : " it was my treacherous heart that deceived me, and I did not know it. But I will not see him!—I promise you that I will not see him ! The sacrifice shall be entire—complete !"

" It must be so," said I, " or it is nothing. You call it a sacrifice, and such let it be, and it will cost you much ; and, perhaps, in the waywardness of feeling, you may sometimes reproach me, and yourself, and Leslie, and regret that ever it was made ; yet I do not despair of beholding the day when you will look back upon it, and say, ' that trial was the first step that brought me nearer to God ! I turn to it in remembrance as one of the best of blessings ! ' "

Something of a faint smile passed over her features.

" You speak comfort to me," she said ; " at least you point to the only consolation that can reach me. This world!—I have nothing more to do with this world !"

I did not combat the natural despair which, under such circumstances, a mind like her's must be expected to exhibit. I knew that time would do its usual work, and that Isabel, if her life was spared, would return to this unsatisfactory world as much as ever disposed to relish its enjoyments and yield to its delusions, till repeated disappointment or declining years had taught her, that it would have been well indeed if the words she now uttered had sooner been verified; and devoutly to wish that, on the first severe shock to hope and expectation, she had withdrawn from a scene where every thing indicates that we are to find no resting-place!

“Tell me then,” she said, “what you would advise me to say to him. Yet, why should I ask? Have you not said every thing in desiring me to do it as simply as I can! And now that I feel sure of my purpose, and am aware of the treachery

of my heart, I need not ask for further counsel."

"No," I replied, "it is but to have a simple purpose, a single eye to the performance of duty, and the manner of doing it never presents an obstacle. I would only caution you to be brief—very brief—without being abrupt you must shew him that you are decided, and above all things avoid the suggestions of feeling."

"I will—I will," she said, with rapid earnestness; "now I must be gone—all is over!"

"God bless you!" she said, with fervour, in reply to my parting benediction; "you must pray for me!"

It was not necessary to remind me of this; never had my feelings been so deeply, so painfully excited as in this interview. There was need, indeed, of prayer for us both. I offered it up that she might be strengthened; and that I,

in the strong and tender interest with which she had inspired me, might not forget, that human friendships and human attachments must never more predominate in a heart which, for many a suffering year, had been struggling to emancipate itself from the fetters with which nature would have bound it to every kind and pleasing being with whom it came in contact."

I now resign the pen to Isabel, who can alone depict the state of her mind after she quitted me.

CHAP. IX.



ISABEL IN CONTINUATION.



“Of all the faculties of the soul,” says Corinne, “for which I am indebted to nature, that of suffering is the only one of which I have the full exercise.”

MAD. DE STAEL.



As soon as I found myself at home, I sat down to write to Leslie. I would not yield to the soft and dangerous feelings which every moment rose from my heart to my eyes, and, as I proceeded in my painful task, more than once obliged me to pause and wipe away my tears, and struggle against myself with an effort which I thought would have destroyed me. “I must act—I must act!” I kept repeating to myself; “I can weep hereafter.”

I was not long in pouring out some of the fulness of my soul ; it would escape me, though I restrained it almost to the breaking of my heart. After much more time spent in curtailing what I had written than I had bestowed in first writing it, I finished, and, by my confidential maid, transmitted to Leslie the following lines :—

“ I cannot but thank you for your
 “ communication ; I cannot but thank
 “ you that you have at last relieved
 “ me from the suspense, and, I may say,
 “ the humiliation of the circumstances
 “ in which you had placed me. I will
 “ make no comment upon your con-
 “ duct. I can only, in justice to my-
 “ self, say, that you mistook my charac-
 “ ter when, at the conclusion of your
 “ letter, you told me that you would
 “ not believe the appeal you made to
 “ my love and to my compassion would
 “ be in vain. I admit, Leslie, that you

“ had cause for such a belief; I will
 “ even acknowledge to you, that, in re-
 “ sisting your appeal, I suffer deeply :
 “ but I must resist it. I do not assume
 “ a virtue that I have not, for, God
 “ knows ! a being cannot live more sen-
 “ sible of possessing deep and glaring
 “ errors than I am : but something
 “ within me forbids that I should in-
 “ crease them by acting as I should
 “ act, were I to accept your offers,
 “ under the circumstances in which
 “ they are made. I can propose no
 “ counsel as to your conduct—it is
 “ sufficient that I make my own such
 “ as may satisfy my conscience, how-
 “ ever it may wound my heart. I
 “ bid you, then, farewell ; and in that
 “ one word all must be comprized :
 “ for, were I to touch upon the asso-
 “ ciations connected with it, perhaps I
 “ could not utter it all—and it must be
 “ uttered ! Once more then, Leslie, I bid
 “ you farewell !”

“ It is in vain,” I said, “ I know that it is in vain to expect to argue myself out of hope,” after I had spent more than an hour in trying to convince myself that I did *not* indulge a belief that Leslie would release himself with all speed from his engagement, and seek me in the most honourable manner.

“ All that I can do,” I continued, “ is to take the present hour as it is, and act right for that, leaving the future, as Miss Delmond says, to Him who governs it.”

Though heavily oppressed, I was not overpowered with misery ; but, I believe, unconsciously to myself, the excitation of having some consequences to expect from the letter I had sent, supported me far more than the better principle of doing my duty. I think this acute analysing of motives, however, ill-fitted to our state of human imperfection, in which a mixture of evil, from the very nature of it, must be dis-

covered even in our best actions. I would not, therefore, recommend it, except when it conduces to the proper result of leading us, with the humility which such a state of error and imperfection ought to inspire, to cast ourselves low before the throne of Him, who alone can simplify, and purify, and renew our deceitful and corrupt hearts. But, at the time of which I speak, I was young in religious knowledge—I was young, indeed, in years; and though daily taught by sad experience something of my own fallen nature, I was not prepared to find that my interview with Miss Delmond had done me so little effectual good, that, on the following day, when Leslie sent me a note containing an ardent desire for an interview, I was upon the very point of returning an assenting answer; but I was saved from such folly and inconsistency by her coming to visit me. I was up stairs; for, to preclude the observation of my

aunt upon my agitated and woe-worn appearance, I had made the most of a slight cold that had attacked me, and kept my room. I begged to see her, and she came up to me; but I found that, without telling her of his note and of my purpose, our conversation would have a restrained air, so much in opposition to the frank and open conversation of yesterday, that it would be impossible for us to proceed without my giving her cause, in my altered manner, to suppose me one of the most capricious and ungrateful of beings.

This was an opinion I could not bear to inspire her with; and I soon replied to the affectionate interest she manifested for me, by shewing her the letter I had sent, and the request from him which had followed it. To detail what passed between us, after I told her, with a burning cheek and faltering words, my wish—for I dare not, for shame, call

it my intention—would be to repeat the substance of our yesterday's conversation. We went over nearly the same ground ; and, after nearly the same resistance and struggle between my heart and my judgment, the latter once more conquered, and, in Miss Delmond's presence, I wrote him but this note, in reply to his request :—

“ An interview must be painful to
 “ me, without having any influence upon
 “ my purpose : I cannot, therefore, yield
 “ to your request.”

Now, indeed, I believed the die was cast ! now, I doubted not that the fiery spirit of Leslie would induce him, without another effort, to withdraw from me for ever ; and now despair took hold upon me with a force I had never known before !

Still was it not wholly unmixed with

hope, till, in the evening, Miss Russell came to me, bringing with her the following lines from Leslie :—

“ It is enough, Isabel ! I will perse-
 “ cute you no more. Had I but known
 “ —had I but guessed at the state of
 “ your affection for me, I would not
 “ have presumed to make so strong an
 “ appeal to it. I quit this place for ever
 “ —this night I bid both it and you fare-
 “ well ! “ E. L.”

“ Is he gone—*is* he gone?” I inquired, with frantic energy, of Elizabeth.

“ Two hours since,” she replied.

“ Then Heaven have mercy upon me !” I said ; “ for now my wretchedness is, indeed, complete ! Oh, Miss Delmond ! cruel woman ! why did you urge me—why did I yield to you ?”

Elizabeth eagerly inquired into the meaning of my words ; and, as well as my agony of mind would permit, I re-

lated to her what had passed: upon hearing which, she began to condemn me very much for my imprudence in seeking counsel of a woman so sure to advise me *wrong*, as Miss Delmond.

“ A mere fanatic!” she said—“ a woman who judged of every body and every thing by the standard of her own calm, milk-and-water temperament. But I shall let her know the mischief she has done,” she went on, “ I can tell her—I shall not spare her for her officiousness.”

But the injustice—the ingratitude, of which I was guilty, in thus permitting so sincere a well-wisher as Miss Delmond to be reviled, flashed across me in the midst of my bitter grief, and I arrested the further expression of Elizabeth’s indignation by intreating her to refrain.

“ It was my own doing,” I said ; “ it was my own fault—if any fault there was in seeking her counsel. But the

fault is not there, Elizabeth! It is here! —here!” and I laid my hand upon my throbbing bosom. “God comfort me! God support me!” and now, with the certainty that I had none else to seek, with genuine faith and devotion I lifted up my heart in prayer.

I have before had occasion to remark, that Miss Russell did not want feeling; she exhibited it in the sympathy with which she entered into my distress—endeavouring to alleviate it, by pointing to the probability of Leslie’s return to me at no distant period. But this hope I opposed by a strong conviction of its frailty.

“I know him too well,” I said—“too well do I know the pride of his heart. He thinks that he has been deceived in me—that he has overrated my affection for him: he will never forgive, either himself or me, such a mistake as that.”

She could not combat this persuasion; for she admitted that his manner, in giv-

ing her the letter she brought, too much sanctioned it.

He had only put it into her hands, saying, "I will thank you to give that to *Miss Melville*;" and to all the questions she put to him, when he announced his intention of departing, he merely returned for answer, "I have no doubt that letter will satisfy Miss Melville. You *must* excuse my leaving the rest of the world unacquainted with my sentiments. It is sufficient that I now for ever bid adieu to D——."

"He then," she continued, "took leave both of my mother and myself."

"Did he appear at all agitated?" I inquired.

"He laboured to appear otherwise," she replied; "but it was evident that he suffered very deeply from some internal feeling, which he would rather have died than suffered to break out into words."

"Then all is over—all is over! and

life is ended for me!" I said; "and now, Elizabeth, will you forgive me if I ask you to leave me? I am best alone."

She endeavoured to controvert this opinion, assuring me that solitude would but overwhelm me with emotions I must make it my study to combat.

"I am not going to indulge emotion," I said. I would have added, "I am going to pray;" but I feared she would smile at me, and I did not say it.

She soon found me utterly incapable of being comforted by any thing she could say. I spoke not—I wept not—I did but lie upon my bed, with now and then a whispered ejaculation for divine assistance. Perceiving that sorrow had exhausted me, and supposing that, if left alone, sleep would overtake me, she at last took an affectionate leave, and withdrew.

I will not lift the sacred veil which it is better to draw over the communion of

a wounded, suffering spirit with its Maker. I will only say, that I passed this night so as to rise in the morning strengthened and comforted. I passed it in a manner mournful indeed, but with feelings which well prepared me for those fresh sorrows, of which this, bitter as it was, proved but the beginning.

CHAP. X.

MISS DELMOND WRITES.

Before I was afflicted, I went astray.

Psalm cxix. 67.

THERE are few persons of any thought or pious reflection, who have not had occasion to remark how much easier it is to submit patiently to those afflictions which we perceive to come immediately from the hand of God, than to those which are the result of our own misconduct, or the misconduct of others towards us. In the former case, we feel how poor, how powerless we are, and, in the passiveness with which we are compelled to yield to the infliction, we are commonly, even the worst of us, for a time at least, taught to know “how

good it is for us to be afflicted." But when our sorrows are the work of our own hands, or of others—or, more properly to speak, when the blindness and insensibility of our minds prevent our looking from human causes to the divine Source from whence alone they derive their agency—what a mixture of restless passions do they not inspire! and how eager, how agitating, are the hopes and fears they excite!—the desire of retaliation—the fervent expectation of a change in circumstances—the dread of receiving none!—what vicissitudes, in short, of painful, and fruitless, and unsanctifying emotion will not the soul experience, that knows not how to extract from every sorrow the latent good, which, in its being a means of turning the heart to God, may ever be wrought out of it.

And Isabel, doubtless, would have been amongst the number of these unhappy creatures, who draw no use from affliction, but rather augment its weight

by adding to it the fretfulness and impatience which, without religious views, must be expected to accompany it—had it not pleased God, before she had in any degree regained her tranquillity, to visit her with a trial of a different kind from that which had ever yet exercised her : a trial severe indeed, but not less than sublime—for it brought with it much brokenness of heart, deep contrition, and a keen and agonizing sense of her past faults ; and which, fearful and many as since then have been her failures, was, I am persuaded, the beginning of a comfort and delight, and knowledge of religion, that she never totally lost.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

In losing the object of my affections, I need not say, I suffered as enthusiastic, ardent creatures alone suffer ;

but it was suffering which wrought no permanent and decisive benefit to my soul. It prompted me to pray, indeed; for, in the anguish of my spirit, I could only look for aid from Him who framed it so acutely to feel; and the very act of prayer for a time composed me. But the root of evil was still within, untouched, and even unapproached. Unsanctified passions, headstrong will, a heart so rebellious to the circumstances laid upon me, that I know not any interval in which Leslie could have returned and renewed his addresses, that I should not have hailed it with joy, and gratified my senseless wishes in accepting him once more. Frequently, when the unhappy violence of my temper was most busy, did I express my regret and disappointment in reproaches to the good Miss Delmond, for the advice by which she had occasioned me, I said, to ruin my happiness, and make myself an outcast from felicity for ever.

She heard me with the most patient sweetness. "A time will come, Isabel," she always said, "when you will think differently; you are impatient of correction: but you will yet, I trust, bless the rod that chastens you for your eternal happiness."

During the long period that I deluded myself with the hope of hearing from Leslie, I never mentioned his name to my aunt, and both she and my uncle, hearing that he had left the place, never to return, were very well satisfied, and, but for my dejected looks and sinking health, would have derived nothing but gratification at the end of the connexion. But it was impossible, without pain, to behold me moving about the house, as it were, mechanically, taking no interest in any thing; and, in the place of the liveliness and gaiety with which I used to endeavour to amuse their domestic hours, sitting silent and spiritless, and with apparent sullenness, brooding only

upon my disappointment and the discontented feelings it inspired.

I saw that all this disturbed and affected them both ; but I had not within me the power to resist the selfishness of my sorrow ; as little could I bear to speak of it. Many times my dear aunt sought to lead me to this, no doubt from a hope that, in speaking, I might obtain some relief for the fulness of my heart. But I knew that, consistently with their avowed opinions, they could not do otherwise than rejoice at the dissolution of my acquaintance with a person of whom they so entirely disapproved, and the mere expression of a sympathy which could not be genuine would only have augmented my uneasiness.

In this uncomfortable manner, some months passed away. An unaccountable estrangement seemed to have taken place between me and these my dearest—best of friends. I felt that the fault was with me, and sometimes I set my-

self in the most determined manner to conquer it ; but insensibly I returned to my usual habits of abstraction and indifference : a blight had fallen upon all my mental powers, and rendered them useless to me. In the midst of this wintry state of feeling, my dear aunt was taken suddenly and dangerously ill, and I gave myself wholly up to attending her, and endeavouring to console my uncle, who was tenderly attached to her. Her illness was of so violent and rapid a nature, that, at the end of three days, it terminated fatally.

This stroke fell upon my poor uncle like a thunderbolt. One would have thought that he had believed her immortal, so utterly confounded and astonished did he appear when this sad event took place. Never shall I forget the scene ! We believed her something better, and I had retired to bed ; for I had been up with her the whole of the preceding night. I had but just fallen asleep,

when I was roused by hearing myself called in a voice of alarm by Mary, our old maid-servant. The sad truth rushed upon me.—“She is dead!” I said, as I started from my bed, and was hastening down stairs.

“No—not dead,” she replied, as she forcibly detained me while she threw some clothing over me, “but she is very bad.” I hastened down to her room; and the first glance I cast upon her pale face, white as the linen that surrounded it, too truly told me that all was over. I spoke to her—she heard me not. “It is Isabel, my dear, dear aunt,” I said, as I cast myself upon her bed, and kissed her cheek—but in vain!

I turned to my poor uncle, who was walking up and down the room, and who seemed quite bewildered, and not capable of comprehending that she could be near death. “I have sent for the doctor,” he said; “he will be here presently—don’t disturb her, Isabel: I

hope she will be better.” “Oh never—never,” I exclaimed—but I recollected myself, and, in a more composed manner, endeavoured to prepare him for the inevitable moment that was so near.

His various feelings quite confused him, and, to my inexpressible wretchedness, he appeared to think that I purposely aggravated the case.

“You are not kind to alarm me thus, Isabel,” he said; “but you are not what you used to be.” And then sitting down by the side of my aunt, he addressed her, as if she were capable of attending to him, and, finding she would not, a sudden sense of alarm took possession of him.

“God help me!” he said: “oh, if you should be taken from me, my dearest, best of wives, what or whom have I left to comfort me? God help me!”

Alas! the moment came. In a very short time she expired in my arms. So totally helpless, and enervated as a child,

was my poor uncle, that they had prevailed upon him to leave the room before her departure.

I had never before witnessed the fearful approach of death, and ill was I fitted to behold it, for the first time, in the person of one so dear to me.

But supernatural strength was granted to my prayers: for by her side I cast myself down, and asked it of God; and then rose, enabled with steadiness—yes, with perfect steadiness, to close the eyes that never looked upon me but with kindness, and from my inmost soul to say, “Thy will be done!”

I then sought for an interview with my uncle, but he would not admit me, or any one else to his presence.

The energy of acting, and above all of endeavouring to act from a sense of duty, supported me that night; but, on the following morning, when, after a short and wretched slumber, I awoke to the full consciousness of the desolation which

had fallen upon us all, I sunk under it, totally overcome. I had yet, however, a duty to perform, in visiting and comforting my poor widowed uncle, upon whom this distress fell the most peculiarly severe. My aunt was so entirely his all, so accustomed to think, and act, and decide for him—so much loved and confided in by him—that it was no common loss he had to deplore.

He was now, also, himself declining in the vale of years; and, added to a natural timidity, and perhaps in some measure, a feebleness of mind, his memory and mental faculties in general were a good deal shaken and impaired. The sad and strange alienation which had sprung up between us, almost ever since my unfortunate acquaintance with Leslie, prevented his turning to me with that perfect and undoubting confidence which, in former days, would have led him, under such a bereavement, to seek

his chief support and temporal consolation in me.

I languished to restore him to his wonted sentiments : my heart yearned to administer to his comfort. I eagerly asked where he was ; they told me he was in the parlour. I hastened down to him ; he was sitting at the breakfast-table reading the Bible. He raised his head as I entered, and burst into tears. I ran towards him and kissed his cheek ; and, as I pressed him to my heart,

“ My dear uncle ! ” I said, “ I will do all I can ! ” — I could add no more — but it sufficed.

“ I know you will, Isabel,” he said ; “ God bless you, my dear ! I know you will be a comfort to me ! ”

As soon as the first transports of his grief at the sight of me had a little worn away, he began, with all the hurry of a mind confused by sudden affliction, to talk of the arrangements which this

melancholy event would render necessary. I thought my heart would have broken while I listened to him ; but when he concluded, by asking me to search in my poor aunt's writing-desk for a paper that it was necessary for him to examine before he issued any orders for the funeral, I almost believed my senses would have given way—such an indefinable terror had I of entering the room which contained her remains. I know not how this was, since I had seen her actually expire ; and, after such a sight as that, might have been supposed capable of supporting to look upon her corpse. But so it was, that when I passed her door that morning, in my way down stairs, I had shuddered with dread lest any one should be coming from it and should open it, in a way to disclose her to my view ; and to think of voluntarily entering the room !—it made me sick at heart to imagine it. But I could not

refuse any thing to the request of my uncle.

“I could not well bear it, Isabel!” he said, “and I know not whom else to ask.”

I rose instantly ; but it was with a trembling frame. I remember catching a glimpse of my face as I passed a mirror, and being startled with the whiteness of it ; it recalled the fearful look of that dear countenance I had last night gazed upon, and now so much dreaded to behold again.

I stood in palpitating terror at the door of this now awful chamber ! A woman I had never seen before suddenly came from it. She appeared to be of the order who perform the last offices for the dead, and who, in the execution of their heartless occupation, only make us regret the necessity for employing them.

“ Ah, Miss Melville !” she said, “ you

will be going to look at your dear aunt ! Come in ;” and she appeared to intend entering the room with me, but I waved her away with my hand.

“ Leave me,” I said ; “ I would be alone,”—and alone I was left.

After the ejaculation of a moment, with noiseless step and suspended breath, I crept into the room, and closed the door, and stood there—the living with the dead ! For a little space I dare not raise my eyes. I had seen her face, and at the first glimpse I hid my own in both my hands, and trembled like an aspen leaf. Cold drops of fear stood upon my forehead. I never was so strangely—so alarmingly affected. I believed that I myself was dying ; and I could almost have called the person back that I had just sent away from me, in order that she might save me from the agony of this dreadful solitude. But this state of mortal trepidation did not last. I thought of all I had been enabled hitherto to sus-

tain and to perform—how firmly, by the mercy of Heaven, I had witnessed the departure of the dear saint whose poor remains occasioned me this puerile unworthy dread—how steadily I had done for her the last mournful offices of duty and affection ; and, as I thus reasoned, I regained some self-possession, and with a determined effort I removed my hand from my eyes. I compelled myself to advance towards the bed—nearer—still nearer—till at last I was by her side ; and, my first mysterious dread subdued, I *could* gaze upon her as she lay in her silent, happy unconsciousness (for such only it seemed), and as I gazed I grew calm—I trembled no more—for never in its loveliest living hours had that face worn the tranquillity, “ the rapture of repose,” which death had stamped upon it !

The traces of a smile still lingered round her mouth, and imparted to the countenance an expression of peace which

living features could not wear. I could almost have believed, that, though divided from its dear companion, the senseless clay still sympathized with the happiness into which the departed spirit had entered.

It was an expression so sweet and heavenly, that, though I had trembled at the thought of beholding it, involuntarily I bent down, and pressed my lips to the cold cheek. Tears streamed from my eyes, and sobs convulsed my bosom.

But I had yet a task to execute of the most painful kind—a task, which, however delicately, however respectfully performed, has the semblance of a violation to all tender and generous feeling—To search the repositories of the dead!—Where is the heart so cold as to attempt this without something of a pang of remorse!

“A few days since,” I thought, “and her hand held these keys! and who would have dared to intrude upon what they

concealed?" But now, how silent—how powerless she is!" and I looked towards her unconscious, clay-cold form with a fresh burst of anguish, as my fancy pictured the indirect kind of insult I was about to offer to it. "But I am in the cause of duty!" I said, to arm myself with courage. I strove against the gushing tears, which almost blinded me as I searched amongst her papers for that my uncle had specified. At length I found it. I hastened down stairs—I put it into his hand—and then nature, wholly exhausted, constrained me, like the patriarch of old, "to seek my chamber, where to weep."

CHAP. XI.

MISS DELMOND WRITES.

The most vulgar man, when he prays—when he suffers, and places hope in Heaven, has, at that moment, something in him which he would express like Milton, Homer, or Tasso, if education had taught him to clothe his thoughts with words.

MAD. DE STAEL.

AFTER the death of Mrs. Melville, a decided and important improvement took place in the habits and conduct of Isabel. The force of her character was subdued: she seemed for a time like one surprised and frightened by the circumstances which had befallen her. Hitherto her days had been unmarked by any other sorrow than such as her imagination had created; but the desertion of Leslie, and the death of her aunt,

were substantial woes, which compelled her to reflect upon life with deeper views than she had yet encouraged. In the unhappy issue of her attachment, she was now capable of discovering that connexion between fault and misfortune, which as surely subsists as cause and effect in the moral as well as in the physical world.

“ Our connexion was founded in error,” she would say, when speaking of her engagement with Leslie : “ it began in concealment. I knew that I acted wrong in listening to the addresses of Leslie in a clandestine manner ; I knew that no argument, either of Elizabeth Russell’s or my own, could make it right. But I was willing to indulge a hope that allowance would be made for the influence of strong affection.”

“ In short, Isabel,” I replied, “ you were determined to follow your own will ; and you have reaped the fruits of it.”

“ Yet how is it, Miss Delmond,” she would say, “ that other people seem to escape the consequences of their misconduct? You know, and I know, of similar instances, where sorrow appears to have been escaped, and where clandestine attachments eventually have turned out happily.”

“ They appear to have so turned out, Isabel ; but we see only the surface of things. I am so sure of retribution, as the consequence of error, that I can no more believe happiness to attend wrong measures, than I can believe I shall put my hand into the fire and not be burned. The tracing out the link between our errors and our sufferings, I conceive to be one of the best human means of arriving at truth.”

In this high and important search, her time, for more than a year after her aunt's death, was occupied. She read the Scriptures ; she studied to find out the path of duty ; and, whenever she

had found it, she steadily pursued it. Her devotion to what was right was considerably strengthened by the removal of Miss Russell's influence over her, owing to the circumstance of that young lady's approaching marriage. This event, in preparation and expectation, so much occupied her time and thoughts, as in some measure to occasion a pause in the extreme intimacy which had hitherto subsisted between them,—a pause which was gratifying to me in every respect. Besides removing what I could not but consider an obstacle to Isabel's thinking or acting right, the cessation of such constant intercourse with Miss Russell afforded me a great deal of Miss Melville's society. I never met with any mind so flexible—so entirely within the influence of those persons with whom it came in contact, as that of Isabel. She took for a time the tone, the sentiments, the whole character of her associates; and this not from any principle of imita-

tion—for, after all, she stood alone. She was like nobody but herself, and nobody else was like her : but it was the result of some quality she possessed ; I think, probably, it was her vivid imagination and intense feelings of sympathy, which transformed her into any sort of character she happened to like ; for I should premise, that it was only those she liked whose company she endured. Accustomed to follow her own inclinations from her earliest youth, she never condemned herself to any society that was not exactly to her taste. While in health and spirits, and full of the high-flown expectations of youth, Miss Russell had been her chosen companion ; but affliction occasioned her to think seriously, and she found a more congenial friend, at the present juncture, in me. She adopted many of my ideas : she read many of my favourite authors : she liked the calm, tranquil manner in which I passed my time—it assimilated with the

chastized and pensive state of her own feelings. Amongst the different ways in which I presume to believe I was useful to her, I had insensibly led her to pursue a habit of visiting the suffering poor ; which habit paved the way to circumstances that I had not foreseen—only, I believe, because I accustomed myself to live on, from day to day, upon actual occurrences, without any indulgence to fancy, or the formation of those airy castles that visionaries so much delight to build. That I, with all my solid, real pursuits, had not yet outlived the age of fond and anxious speculation, was too painfully evinced by the variety of hopes and fears which followed an incident that Isabel shall herself relate.



ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.



I KNOW of nothing that more soothed and elevated me above the consideration

of my trials, than a custom I had acquired from Miss Delmond, of paying visits to the cottages of the poor. Amongst them there was one habitation which received me as a frequent guest : it was the dwelling of an aged widow, who had long been a pensioner of our family, and of my dear aunt's in particular, who had a value for her from the circumstances of her having been, for many years of her life, a trusty and confidential servant to her.

Alice Gray (for that was the name of this woman) was a person of a character more common than is often suspected in the humble walks of life. Those who have been blessed with the advantage of education, are too apt to suppose that it comprizes also the gifts of intellect, and that nobody can be a tolerable companion who has not received the benefit of polite instruction ; but, as the poet has justly told us,—

“ Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air ;”

and in the person of Alice Gray there existed a notable instance of the truth of this remark. She was a woman of extraordinary good sense, and, I might almost say, fine taste, rude and uncultivated as it had been for many years of her life.

“ But it had pleased God,” she said, “ to cast her upon a bed of sickness for the last ten years of her life ; and then, Miss Isabel,” she went on, “ I began to think what I had to comfort me : why, I could read, and so I did ; and the neighbours, who knew I was a bit of a scholar, used to bring me play books and story books, and such like to amuse me. And I remember the time when I would have liked nothing better than plenty of time to read and enjoy them. But this does not do for me now, I thought : I may be taken off all in a moment, just as I was all in a moment

laid upon this bed in this helpless state ; and how would it be with my soul, if I were called to appear before God just from reading some idle love story. No, this will never do : I must read the Bible ; and you may suppose, I went to it with no great enjoyment, after my love stories, and plays, and fables. But I happened, first of all, to pitch upon the story of Joseph and his brethren, which I had heard and read times and often before, but never with so much pleasure. I never thought it so beautiful ! ‘ Is the old man, your father, yet alive !’ Oh, how I cried over that verse. Well, I thought, I must needs go to play books, and such things to please me, when, here, I can have such pleasure as this ; and then I searched for the parables, and all the beautiful parts, for I had a strange fancy to be pleased in my reading ; and pleased I was sure enough, more than ever I was with all the books I ever read in my life ; and, thus, from one thing I

went to another, first its beauty, and then its doctrine, and then its comfort. In short, Miss Isabel, I never seem safe without the Bible by my side : and now, my dear, if you would read some parts over with me, how I should enjoy it all over again."

To this request I lent a ready ear ; and, whenever I was particularly depressed in spirits, I had a sovereign balm in the prospect of an hour thus spent with this good old creature.

I was often astonished at the wisdom with which she discoursed upon the portions of Scripture I read to her, and the sagacity with which she would discover, from the tone of my voice and general appearance, the part of it which would be best adapted for my feelings. She was almost a member of the family, at least her past intercourse with it rendered her very well aware of what my peculiar trials were. She knew the impetuosity of my temper—my self will—

my impatience. Hence she directed me generally to such texts and chapters as inculcated the duties of a Christian's life—his conflict—his armour—his final reward.

“ Ah ! I see you have had something to vex you ! ” she would say sometimes, when a recent trouble had left the traces of tears upon my countenance : “ well, dear ! just turn to Philippians, second chapter, and read a few verses of it, and then we'll talk them over ; ” and, in the talking them over, as she called it, such peace, such light, would dawn upon my soul, that I never could avoid considering that poor old Alice Gray was humanly instrumental in assisting and strengthening my, as yet, unconfirmed religious principles.

But her day was almost spent, and I perceived, with real sorrow, that the consolation we mutually derived from each other—she, in leading me to the study of divine things, and I, in minister-

ing to her temporal wants—was shortly to come to a close. She was now so weak that we could not discourse much upon what I used to read to her: they were chiefly brief texts, upon which she loved to meditate.

“ For I can’t talk now, my dear !” she would say ; “ but, when we meet in Heaven, we shall have sweet discourse together—better than ever we have had here, though that has been very sweet to me.” And thus she endeavoured to apologize for any appearance of declining interest in my attentions, which she feared I might observe. I had always pressed her to point out to me any way in which I could be useful to her, either before or after her decease ; and she had named one or two instances, in which she thought I could. Still her chief anxiety was about me.

“ If I could but see you married, Miss Isabel !—not to that gay, thoughtless gentleman I heard so much about,

that they told me you were to have had ; —no, no : some good man. Oh ! I do wish that with all my heart !”

It was not long before poor Alice, from the indulgence of vague wishes in my behalf, proceeded to endow them with something of form and feature. The arrival of a young clergyman to officiate as curate for Mr. Forrester, an evangelical minister of eminent piety in our town, was the signal of her happiness in my prospects. Mr. Manvers (which was the name of this young man) was likely to be thrown a good deal into my society, from his connexion with Miss Delmond, who was his aunt ; and Alice was quite sure we should “ come together,” as she phrased it.

He had been resident in the place, however, more than a month, and as yet I had not seen him : this was not extraordinary, as his strict fulfilment of the duties of his sacred office left him but little time for any other engagement. I

had heard Miss Delmond often speak with pleasure of his being settled so near her, and express sentiments of the highest value and respect for his character and acquirements, which common report also testified to be of the most superior order. But it was from Alice that I received such enthusiastic testimony to his merits, that, languid as was now my interest in any of the circumstances of life, I should not have been displeased if chance had afforded me an opportunity, unperceived by him, of seeing a person represented to me as so unusually captivating. He had won the heart of Alice by visiting her sick bed with prayer and consolation, as he had also done those of many others of her friends in humble life, whose sufferings required the aid of spiritual assistance.

Frequently had Alice intreated me to visit her at the hour when he usually called upon her ; but from such a step, of course, I should have desisted, had not

sorrow rendered me averse from encountering the notice of strangers ; and finding that her efforts towards producing an introduction between us were likely to be fruitless, she at length abandoned them ; satisfied, as she told Miss Delmond, that if it was ordained that Miss Isabel should marry Mr. Manvers, it must be, though she herself, she feared, should never live to see it.

Over this chimera of the poor old woman, both Miss Delmond and I had smiled together, and had never given it more attention than a smile, till chance produced an unexpected incident.

The poor woman continued gradually to decline, and at last became so weak and exhausted, that every hour we anticipated would be her last. At this time I myself was so unwell with a severe cold as to be unable to leave the house, and my duties to my old pensioner I was obliged to delegate to Miss Delmond. In about a week I was better ;

and hearing from my friend that Alice was at the last stage of existence, and, she feared, would scarcely live through the day, I determined to gratify my desire of beholding her once more before she died ; especially as I found she had expressed a wish to see me. I was yet very unwell, and, but upon such an emergency, I could not have found myself strong enough to walk so far : as it was, I was not by any means equal to such an undertaking, and when I arrived at the cottage, I was obliged to rest myself for some little time before I was sufficiently recovered from the fatigue of my walk to be able to speak to Alice.

She was alone ; for the duties of their daily occupations had called away from her those of her neighbours, who usually attended to her wants. But this circumstance, so melancholy, so appalling to the fancy of many persons, I have observed generally to afford no uneasiness to the poor. I believe it may be that their

imagination is seldom their foe. They see nothing in death but the act of dying, and that they know must be endured alone. Their continual contest with the actual and tangible evils of life, most happily exempts them from the fears and fancies which accompany an excited mind. Hence, in their last moments, they require but little more from the hand of friendship, than such aid as the dependant condition of humanity demands for those who are physically incapable of assisting themselves ; and how little that is, the solitude—the discomfort—the neglected death-bed of poverty is most commonly an affecting instance ! By her not taking any notice of my approach, I imagined she was asleep, and I went gently to the bedside to look at her ; but I perceived by the difficulty of her breathing and her total insensibility to my pronouncing her name, that the sleep which was stealing

over her was one from which she would never more awaken.

My weakened spirits were quite overpowered at the sight, and I was constrained to indulge them by a flood of tears. Besides the endearment which springs from the consciousness of having been useful to the object of our regard, I had that love for the good old creature which almost every one feels for those who had the care of their earliest infancy, as she had of mine.

“ You have not been long here after the departure of your dear mistress, poor Alice !” I said ; and, at the fond associations which remembrance with that thought renewed in my mind, I felt so heavily oppressed, that I was fain to take refuge from my feelings in the act of prayer.

I had long been thus engaged, and was yet kneeling with my head bent down upon the withered hand of the

dying woman, when the sound of a foot-step close by my side made me start up with a natural feeling of unwillingness to have my sacred emotions intruded upon.

A form stood over me which I had never seen before, but to which I was assured no other name but that of Manvers belonged, so completely did it realize the conception which the description of Alice had occasioned me to form of it—tall and erect, there was an air of dignity about him which, strongly as it was marked in his graceful figure, was yet more forcibly delineated in every feature of his beautiful countenance; for beautiful it was, though majestic severity (softened as it was by an expression of pity) predominated to a degree that almost made me shrink as if in the presence of a being superior to the common errors and weaknesses of humanity.

He spoke, and in a tone of voice so singularly charming, so indicative of all

that I had imagined of him, and which his appearance so justly confirmed, that had I not seen, but merely heard him, I am certain I should have said, "That is the voice of Mr. Manvers." But I should remark, that upon the subject of a voice, as upon most other things, I was a visionary: I had a theory of my own, which persuaded me to believe that the tones of the voice were generally to be taken as affording some illumination to the character of the speaker; but I must acknowledge it to be quite unworthy of any rational mind to indulge in such speculations, which, like most other premises that will not stand the test of argument, usually lead to false and absurd conclusions.

However, the voice of Mr. Manvers was melody itself, though united with a tone of indefinable decision and power, corresponding with the towering grandeur of his figure.

"Pardon this intrusion!" he said: "I

believe I am addressing Miss Melville. Poor Alice has left me no stranger to your christian kindness to her! But suffer me now," he continued, "to supply your place by the side of this poor sufferer, who will not, I perceive, require the attentions of either of us very long!"

I expressed an unwillingness, which I sincerely felt, to desert my old friend while any spark of life remained.

"I honour your humanity!" he said, "but allow me to prevail upon you. These scenes are of a very affecting character, and you are evidently at present suffering from other causes."

With the most delicate respect he would have led me from the cottage; but ere I could depart, I felt that I must bid farewell to my poor Alice, whose spirit was fast fleeting from this transitory scene. I did but press her aged hand in mine, and silently ejaculated a mental prayer, that her passage to a better world might be short and easy, and

then I turned away. I could have lingered there all day, and probably should thus have gratified the mournful craving of my soul for these sights of sorrow, which in the present state of my feelings, administered to it such a salutary sadness ; but the unexpected arrival of Mr. Manvers precluded my remaining there without, as I thought, some violation of propriety.

I yielded, therefore, to the gentle, but determined effort with which he drew me from the side of the unconscious Alice ; whose wishes, like those of most short-sighted mortals, confined as they are to the evanescent things of time and sense, had received their completion when she, poor soul ! had no joy to derive from it. I paused at the door for a few moments to compose myself, for I was much distressed.

With what delicacy, not to embarrass me by observation, yet, what pious affection ! (if I may use such a term, and

I can think of none other to convey my meaning) did Mr. Manvers continue to address me, as I thus waited for an interval of tranquillity.

“ These are painful lessons which we must take in the school of human life !” he said ; “ but it is by such alone that instruction is rendered complete ; and both you and I,” he continued, “ may date some valuable, some undying treasure of thought, some sublime acquisition to memory, from the death-bed of this humble christian. These are the scenes, Miss Melville, these are the scenes which the christian seeks—bless God that he has guided your feet in their way ; for it is the way that leads to *Him* !”

“ I do bless Him,” I said, “ for the mercy of affliction !” and I spoke the truth from my inmost soul. “ But I am still human !”—I could not proceed ; nevertheless I shrunk from thus exhibiting to a stranger the secrets of my heart ; and declining by my hand, rather than

my voice, his request that I would sit down, and not thus agitate my spirits, I drew my veil over my disturbed countenance and hastened home.

CHAP. XII.

 MISS DELMOND WRITES.

I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
 Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life
 Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
 That he is honest in the sacred cause.

COWPER.

WHEN Miss Melville communicated to me the little incident narrated above, I cannot say that I heard it without pleasure, inasmuch as, although not so sanguine as to its consequences as poor Alice Gray, I had long wished that my nephew should become acquainted with Isabel; and under no form of introduction could she have engaged his notice in so interesting a manner to him, as in that which had actually occurred.

In sketching the character of Edgar Manvers, I fear to be considered partial,

as the nearness of relationship in which he stood to me, scarcely renders it probable that I should altogether avoid this fault. But to speak of him without testifying that, in my conception of christian virtue, he approached the nearest to perfection of any one I ever met with, would be impossible ; and I the rather should bear this testimony to him, which I know might reasonably be withheld by the generality of those who knew him, because I was well acquainted with all he had to struggle with in his own peculiar temptations, and in the dissatisfaction of his friends at the opinions he had adopted, and the pursuits to which those opinions induced him to devote his time.

Of an ardent and enthusiastic temperament, united to the advantages of personal beauty, and an elegant mind, no one could more successfully have presented himself as a votary at the shrine of pleasure, than Edgar ; and no

one, from the suggestions of impetuous passions, would have been more likely to offer such a sacrifice than himself, if the fire and feeling of his character had not been always opposed by such qualities of firmness and decision, as, under the varied circumstances of life, would have induced him to suffer, and to die, rather than part with what, as a philosopher, he was satisfied to call the conscious integrity of his own heart; but which, when he became a christian, he considered as the approbation of God. A hero in the field of battle; a patriot bleeding for his country; a martyr burning at the stake for his religion: whatever humanity could have been called upon to dare, or to do, would have been the enterprize of such a mind as Edgar's. The energies of his character had very early developed themselves; and though the claims of a numerous family, of which this boy was the eldest, rendered

it almost an act of injustice in his father towards his other children, to allow any one of them the advantages of a classical education ; yet the burying in obscurity such extraordinary talents as he possessed, appeared a still greater act of injustice ; and he was finally sent to Eton, and from thence to the University. The knowledge that he was so benefited, by the sacrifice of many comforts on the side of his parents, and that it was to induce exertions on his part which were to decide his whole future destiny, sufficed to excite all the powers he possessed for his advancement and distinction. They were not exercised in vain. He obtained the highest academical honours ; was elected fellow of the college of which he had been admitted a member ; and, as his father phrased it, “ might now lie a bed if he liked for the rest of his life.” But, in his twenty-fourth year, Edgar Manvers

was not likely to sit down contented with his acquisitions, without any effort towards extending them. Whether his determination respecting his future destiny would have been more judicious, if accidental circumstances had not combined to give it a particular bias, it is not necessary for me to discuss ; certainly, his place in society would have been more distinguished, and his comfort and ease in this life considerably promoted, if he had thought and cared less about another world ; and he would not have incurred the heavy displeasure of his father, and the ridicule of his brothers and sisters, and as much contempt as the wise ones of the earth, pour upon those weak ones who seek for a portion in heaven. But, nevertheless, as he is no longer of this world, I am willing to believe, that the sacrifice he made for securing an inheritance in a better one was not bestowed in vain ; but that, according to the established

promise of his Maker, “ what he sowed, that he reaps.”*

It was by the powerful ministry of Dr. Wilson, an evangelical divine of the university of which Edgar was a member, that he was determined, not only in his views for the church, as a profession, but as the assumption of a holy office, to which he was to dedicate his whole future life.

At the present time, he had not long entered upon his holy profession, and, till his future plans were quite decided, he had accepted the proposal of Mr. Forrester to officiate in the capacity of his curate.

That I, who loved him as a mother (for as the child of a dear, and only sister, now no more, he stood to me almost

* Galatians, vi. 7. 8. Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.

in the relationship of a son) that I should think persuasion hung upon his lips, and that eloquence so beautiful, so impressive, had never yet been listened to, as when, for the first time, I heard him preach, may perhaps be pardoned, especially as the general voice of public opinion was even clamorous in his favour, and more than sanctioned all that my fond partiality for him inspired, and far more than I ventured to express; for upon the subject of his merits, every one was more loquacious than I was; for I not only knew they might be safely left to speak for themselves, but, I also knew that the rigid, unbending purposes of Edgar, would soon transform his present admirers into foes, when they discovered that, in their pastor, they had obtained no addition to their visiting list; no flirting gallant for the young ladies; no fourth for the card, table of the elder ones; no acquisition to a quadrille; no recruit to be on duty

at a ball, or a concert. I knew, in short, that Edgar would in a very short time, be as much reviled, as he was at first admired: a prophetic feeling which was not long of being realized. “Dear, what an odd man is Mr. Manvers!” was now the cry of the young ladies, instead of “what a charming creature!”—“Papa asked him to dine with us the other day, and instead of declining it with some civil excuse, he said, at once, ‘he did not enter into general society.’”—“I am sure Mr. Manvers need not lecture us upon the duties of humility,” would be the remark of the young men; “for never was seen so proud a man. Jack Forster asked him, by way of doing the civil thing, and getting acquainted with him, to go out coursing with him the other morning; and he replied, with all the airs of a prime minister, that he had totally given up such pursuits as were inconsistent with his function as a clergyman.”

I found it so utterly in vain to defend my poor nephew against this sudden tide of dissatisfaction in the public mind, that I let it take its course ; satisfied that it was not of a kind to do him any injury, however annoying, like other trifling assaults to patience and good sense. But amongst the most inveterate of his enemies, none were so bitter against him as the whole Russell family : which was rather unfortunate, as his relationship to them, jointly with mine, occasioned him, of necessity, to be now and then thrown into their society. Whenever he was so circumstanced, it afforded an opportunity, never lost to the whole family, and Miss Russell in particular, of manifesting their disapprobation of him, by general invectives upon all fanatics, methodists, missionaries, converted Jews, Bible societies, extempore preachers, and hypocrites ; which latter term, in their fancy, appeared to be synonymous with any one, and all of the former.

The silent indifference with which he listened to them, or the calm good sense with which, when they were very preposterous, Edgar exposed the ignorance and fallacy of their religious opinions, invested him with a superiority which they knew not how to support; and gradually his visits had, by mutual though tacit consent, subsided into the mere distant interchange of such civility as he felt himself, from his connexion with them, called upon to shew them.

But, however obnoxious to them or to others, he held "the even tenor of his way," unmoved by censure, and, equally must it be said of him, unaltered by praise, which followed him in a far greater proportion than dissatisfaction; for even his enemies were too sensible of his advantages as a minister, not to crowd his church (excepting the Russells, who delighted to say they would not be seen in such a place), and, though it was as a mere matter of taste that they went to

admire his splendid eloquence, it was not unfrequently that they “remained to pray.”

The languor with which her recent misfortunes had affected her spirits, rendered Isabel so indifferent to every thing that was proceeding around her, that even the report she had not failed to hear of the merits of the new clergyman produced no inclination on her side to hear him. I was rather sorry for this: not only because I had a respect for her opinion, which made me desirous of finding how far it was in his favour, but because I believed the interest she would find in hearing him, would induce her to be a constant attendant upon a ministry, which, my views of the subject inclined me to think, would be more beneficial to her than that which she was accustomed to attend.

But I had not urged it, for many reasons, and for this more especially—that, however I was persuaded of the truth of my own opinions, I by no means wished

to force them upon another. I was not so exclusive in the adoption of them, as to suppose that no one, who did not absolutely and entirely think with me, could be considered as possessing any safe principles of religion. I was more especially unwilling, at the present crisis of her life—which I considered, though an important, to be far, very far, from a decisive one—to lead the mind of Isabel to the adoption of any measure which I did not suppose she would have sufficient stability to pursue ; and that her religious views would yet be subject to many revolutions, I dared not disguise from myself. Though yet under the pressure of sorrow, and daily exercised with severe trial, from the undisciplined state of her mind, which constantly brought her to the duties of devotion for strength and consolation, there were occasional moments of returning animation, which bespoke how much the fire of her spirit, and the ardour of her imagination, were yet unsubdued, and which, like the fever

that preys upon the corporal frame, I well knew must be eradicated, before any complete renovation of the moral system could reasonably be expected. I wished, but I feared, to introduce her to the notice of Manvers. When fancy predominated—and I could not always resist its suggestions—I had, as well as poor old Alice, my visions in behalf of Isabel. To have seen her the wife of Edgar would have been, I believed, to see her in the possession of a friend the best calculated to advance her spiritual interest, as well as, by his cultivated mind and strong sense, to form the companion and guide of her intellectual taste. But I doubted whether she was equally calculated to retain, as to excite, the affection of such a man. To inspire him with interest and admiration, I felt assured she was exactly the person—subdued, as she now was, by affliction, but with just so much of the force of her character remaining, as evinced the strength and

power of her mental endowments. But this would not last. I knew it would not, could not, subsist against the influence of time, of habit, of returning health and spirits, and an elasticity of mind, which bore up against suffering by the constant excitement it was continually seeking, and, failing to find, was as constantly making for itself out of every thing that surrounded it. Already the pursuits to which she had wholly devoted her time, upon the first attack of misfortune, were beginning to be mingled with those occupations of taste which the loss of Leslie had deprived her of any stimulus for exercising; and, like all persons who indulge a thirst for excitement, Isabel could exert herself for nothing without stimulus. The calm enjoyment of the many resources she possessed, she never knew; and, without being to be called vain, the meed of praise and admiration was too necessary to her, to render the exercise of her various ac-

complishments of much value in her own estimation, when performed in solitude, or before an audience whose opinions she considered of no importance. This contempt of general notice she had indulged, without any solicitude as to its infallible consequences, and, I believe, almost without any consciousness that she had so manifested it, till she perceived herself the object of censure and dislike to many persons, whom I am persuaded she never had the remotest intention of offending.

“ I am sure I never thought about them ; I did not know they were in the room !” she has replied to me sometimes, when I have suggested to her some imprudent remark or careless inattention, which I conceived might be applied by some persons present to themselves.

“ That very indifference, Isabel,” I have on such occasions replied to her, “ is the worst of affronts. People will rather forgive that you should abuse

them altogether, than that you should pass them over without notice."

"Upon my word," she would say, "I think the most civil thing one can do, to nine people out of ten, is to pass them over without notice ; for what can one say about them ? There is so and so," and she specified particular persons, " what can be said about them to engage affection or respect ? They do not openly break any of the commandments, and they pay their debts, and they think it a right thing to go to church ; and they give pleasant entertainments, and people go to them, and laugh at them, and they laugh at their guests ; some of whom go round the room to point out what is ridiculous in the donors of the feast ; and they go round to point out what is ridiculous in their guests ; and such seems to be this world and those who occupy it ! and what *can* be said about it ? Where, and with whom, is there any heart, any soul,

any thing to love, to value, to build upon?"

"With none but the Christian, Isabel," I have always answered to these petulant inquiries, "so natural to a mind satiated and weary of the unmeaning hollow interchange of worldly connexions, and not endued with a principle sufficiently gracious, sufficiently holy and charitable to look upon them with the commiseration the case deserves. And yet, my dear!" I have added, "these are the people to whom you look for happiness; not exactly, perhaps, such as you have been describing; not the nine out of ten whom you think it kind to pass over without notice; but amongst the distinguished by talent and taste—amongst the *few* that you wish to exert yourself for, and whose notice is essential to your exertions, what can you find to build upon? What is their admiration, what is their notice, what their favour, that to obtain it you run such hazards,

you make such sacrifices, you commit such faults—at least the fault of not avoiding to wound the self-love of those who have not these distinctions of intellect? However contemptible you may singly consider them, you will find that, united, they have the power to wound you in no inconsiderable degree :” and then I have quoted to her the words of an author, who blends in his writings with much that is disgusting (and considering his sacred profession, perfectly detestable) so much that is beautiful and instructive, that I may be pardoned, perhaps, for here repeating the sentiments I considered as so peculiarly applicable to the case of Miss Melville :—

“ Revenge, from some baleful corner,
 “ shall level a tale of dishonour at thee,
 “ which no innocence of heart or integrity of conduct shall set right! The
 “ fortunes of thy house shall totter! thy
 “ character, which led the way to them,
 “ shall bleed on every side of it! Thy

“ faith questioned, thy works belied; thy
 “ wit forgotten, thy learning trampled
 “ upon, to wind up the last scene of
 “ thy tragedy, cruelty and cowardice,
 “ twin ruffians, hired and set on by ma-
 “ lice, in the dark, shall strike together
 “ at all thy infirmities and mistakes!
 “ The best of us lie open there; and
 “ trust me, trust me, Yorick, when to
 “ gratify a private appetite, it is once re-
 “ solved upon that an innocent and an
 “ helpless creature shall be sacrificed,
 “ ’tis an easy matter to pick up sticks
 “ enough from any thicket where it has
 “ strayed, to make a fire to offer it up
 “ with.* ”

But to all my remarks, enforced by
 any and all kinds of authority, Isabel
 yielded only a nominal assent: she pur-
 sued her own course, unchecked by my
 remonstrances; till, at length, her career
 was for a time impeded by the trials

* Sterne.

which had befallen her ; and, if I had ventured to be sanguine as to their result, I should have blessed them for the humility they had certainly, for the present, forced upon her. But I dared not be sanguine, especially as I daily saw some symptoms of reviving spirit, which made me tremble for a renewal of her past imprudencies. My great dependence, as I have before said, was upon the removal of Miss Russell's influence ; for that had always been one of the strongest exciting causes of her mistakes.

Such was the situation of circumstances, when the meeting she has recorded took place between her and my nephew ; after which, their intercourse became very frequent and unrestrained. But of this interview, and its consequences, Isabel must speak : I mourn them not—though for ever they blighted the worldly happiness of Edgar, so fondly beloved by me—and though they added to the bitterness which filled that cup of

repentance which was doomed, to the latest moment of her existence, to be the portion of Isabel Melville. But I hasten to resign my task to her, who can better fulfil it. I find, for the sake of brevity, that I must here pass over a considerable portion of her MS. It relates various incidents and interviews which occurred between her and my nephew. I resume it at that period of their acquaintance when his strong admiration and interest in her apparently advancing knowledge and delight in religion, had conspired to create an attachment for her in his ardent bosom, which, resolutely as he laboured to subdue or resist it, no efforts could disguise from my observation.

CHAP. XIII.

ISABEL, IN CONTINUATION.

Religion is nothing, if it is not every thing ; if existence is not filled with it ; if we do not incessantly maintain in the soul this belief in the invisible—this self-devotion—this elevation of desire, which ought to triumph over the low inclinations to which our nature exposes us.

MADAME DE STAEL.

No species of trial was so insupportable to me as a situation of stillness and repose ; that is, a state of mind unpossessed by any object capable of exciting its energies. From the earliest period of my life, I never could remain tranquil under such circumstances. The restlessness of my spirit never failed to make, when it could not find, materials to feed the fire with which it so in-

tensely burned ; that fire of enterprize, of action, of perpetual activity, which long before age would have done its sorrowful office, has consumed the feeble “ tenement of clay ” it inhabited.

But in tracing back my story, I have been struck with the curious manner in which materials for the excitement in which I so much delighted, have generally, in the earlier part of my life, presented themselves to my notice, without much exertion on my part to procure them. When my dear aunt was taken from me, and it appeared that Leslie had totally abandoned any intention of returning to me, and my uncle’s declining health occasioned us to give up even the small circle of visiting in which we had hitherto engaged, I should apparently have had nothing more to do with the busy hopes and fears of life, but must have secured my all of enjoyment, in the best of pursuits—the performance of my duty.

And to this pursuit, and to this enjoyment, I did for many months devote myself; and not without success. But time, which restores all things to their level, had brought back many of my anxious, restless feelings; and what they would have urged me to pursue that was hazardous, or to abandon that was good, I dare not venture to assert, if my acquaintance with Mr. Manvers had not at least occupied, and so far disarmed the ardour of my mind of a great portion of its danger.

Ever since our first meeting at the house of Miss Delmond, we had insensibly glided into habits of intimacy with each other; and it was not difficult for me to perceive, that he wished to consider himself as connected with me in the ties of friendship.

If I had entertained any doubts upon this point, a circumstance which occurred about this time quite removed them.

As Miss Delmond lived not far from me, I was frequently in the habit of walking down to her, after my uncle retired for the night, which he always did at a very early hour. Upon such occasions, Mr. Manvers (who, since our more intimate acquaintance, had sought my society very frequently) generally used to be present, and often read to us, as we occupied ourselves with our work. One evening, I paid Miss Delmond a visit of this kind : but Mr. Manvers not being there, I undertook to read to my friend a new tragedy, which had been lent me in the morning as a very great favour by Miss Russell, and which, as it was then acting with great applause at the London theatres, and had produced a sensation in the public mind, I thought Miss Delmond might like to know something about. I should not have ventured it, neither would she, in the presence of Manvers, whose opinions upon theatrical subjects were quite decided,

and not to be influenced by any sort of arguments that could have been proposed. With such a conviction, I know not what could have induced me to enter the lists of disputation with him, when, unexpectedly entering the room, he detected with a glance the rapid manner in which I was secreting the tragedy in my work-basket, and inquired with a smile, "what studies he could have interrupted, which I so sedulously wished to conceal from observation." I had not been pleased with the languid interest Miss Delmond had lent to the production, all the time I had been reading it; for I was not past the age or the feeling which inclined me to think the extravagant delineations it contained of passion extremely natural and fine; and I was still less pleased with her, when she replied for me to the remark of Manvers, "Isabel is not sorry, I dare say, to resign to you the task of amusing us with something more pro-

fitable than a tragedy which Miss Russell has put into her hands, and which she has been kind enough to read a part of to me."

"I don't know, however," said I, with a faint smile, "that I should have been so kind, had I known that it was so distasteful to you."

"No otherwise distasteful, my dear," she replied, "than all extravagant and distorted representations of such passions, as are dangerous enough, in their natural violence, without any exaggerated description of them, must prove to any mind desirous to behold human nature under the dominion of principle and self-control,—not under the excitement of energies which belong to, and characterize demons."

"According to that doctrine, then," said I, "you would reject many of the finest scenes in Shakespear: in short," I continued, with increasing warmth, "I don't know what there is either of

beautiful or sublime that you would not reject."

"Nothing," said Mr. Manvers; "pardon me, Miss Melville, my seeming abruptness, and this intrusion of my own sentiments upon the question; but I will undertake to reply for my aunt, that the principles she professes, would lead to the rejection of nothing that is truly beautiful or sublime. For what is there," he continued—(his fine majestic figure seeming to dilate in grandeur, as he rose in the energy of speaking, and lifted up his eyes with a kind of sacred enthusiasm)—"what is there either of beautiful or sublime which does not emanate from the Deity? There is nothing beautiful but what is true—there is nothing true but God!"

I almost trembled at the idea of opposing myself to such an antagonist, but the humour I was in rendered me intrepid; moreover there undoubtedly, as I thought, mingled amidst much that

was true, and all that he believed to be so, a considerable proportion of the enthusiasm of a sect.

“ How many then are the sentiments, the descriptions, and the scenes in poets and in painters, and in all the votaries of the fine arts—things which have received the sanction of the wisest, and the most learned, and most accomplished persons in all ages, you would reject, Mr. Manvers,” said I, “ and from how many sources of innocent, and even laudable gratification, would you cut yourself out ! and for what ? ”

“ For the sake of duty,” he replied ; “ for the sake of preserving the purity, the sanctity of my mind, and keeping the current of my thoughts in the channel which conducts them most directly to the divine source of all that is holy—all that is good ! ”

“ But you cannot always be engrossed in the contemplation of such solemn, such sacred themes,” I replied ; “ the

mind must have intervals of repose as well as the body—in the latter we have the refreshment of sleep, what does that indicate, but that by analogy the spirit must also have its periods of rest and recreation?”

“Undoubtedly,” said he, “the pursuits of taste and of literature could never find a more ardent, a more enthusiastic votary, than in me; and had I not, by the blessing of Providence, been taught to imbibe a principle of counteraction to their influence, I know not in whom they would have discovered a disciple more likely to end, as thousands have done, their victim! I know not any one naturally more prone to follow those fascinating, but dangerous paths, into which an unlimited indulgence of the faculty of taste is likely to lead its possessor.”

“And why should they be dangerous, and why should you turn your face so decidedly from them?” I again inquired.

“I have but one answer to give you,” he said: “because they would lead me from the path of duty.”

“And how,” said I, “how could your admiration—for as a man of taste you must admire it—how could your delight in Shakespear’s tragedy of Othello, for instance, how could that lead you from the path of duty?”

“Forgive me,” said he, “the implied reproof to you which I must seem to make; but, before I could bestow unqualified admiration, or express much delight in such a work as Othello, I must have wandered very far indeed from that line of duty which my principles and my profession equally and imperiously command me to walk in.”

I felt myself blush all over. I remembered, that however I had been accustomed to discuss certain subjects of taste in general society, as matters of course, without any solicitude to the details they comprized, I was not now talking

with a person of the world, invested with all the loose morality and latitude of sentiment which belongs to such a character. — I might have known, that the natural delicacy of Manvers, fostered as it was by the sanctity of his life and occupations, would incline him to recoil with great distaste from any woman who avowed, as I had just done, so favourable an opinion of so immoral a production as the tragedy of Othello. But, probably, discovering from my embarrassment the ideas which had occasioned it, he resumed the subject in the point of view in which alone I had certainly wished to propose it; and in so resuming it, he skilfully, and with much consideration for my feelings, precluded the severe reprehension which, after his last remark, I could not have failed to apply to myself, had he ceased to speak upon it.

“The jealousy of Othello—the villainy of Iago,” he proceeded, “are powerfully, exquisitely pourtrayed! But from

whom, and from what do they emanate? What passions do they represent? Are they not those which expressly characterize that evil one, who, we are told, was a liar and a murderer from the beginning?"

"But, since such passions actually exist, and must and will exist," said I, "as long as the world endures—"

"Doubtless they must," and he hastily interrupted me, "because we know that it must needs be that offences come; but consider for one moment, my dear Miss Melville, what it is that fills the world with confusion and distress; what are the tempers that destroy happiness, disturb peace, and spread ruin and desolation every where within their sphere? are they not the votaries of ungoverned passion, the sensual, the selfish?"

"And does not the masterly manner in which these unhappy passions are represented, disarm your severity?" I said.

"It would, unquestionably," he re-

plied, "if I had not endeavoured to establish a better principle of judging in my mind, than that of taste ; or rather, I should say, if I had not cultivated my taste upon a different principle to that established by the usage of society. Such works of imagination as Othello, now, affect me much in the same way as some of Spagnoletti's pictures, in one of which he represents a man as being flayed alive. I may admire the execution, but I turn with disgust from the conception of such a subject. Just thus I turn from all ideas which have no relation to what is true ; that is, which are founded in error, as the indulgence of bad passions and immoral feelings must, by every person, be allowed to be.

"Now, Miss Melville," he continued, perceiving that my silence was more the result of sullenness than conviction, "just consider the jealousy of Othello, upon the fine delineation of which passion the whole, and certainly the great

merit of the tragedy rests. What is jealousy? Strip it of the ornamental dress in which the poet has decked it, and look at it in its native deformity."

"It is a natural passion," said I, "and, as such, interesting."

"Admitting your inference," he replied, "I would still ask, what renders it interesting? You will tell me, very properly, it is that great degree of sympathy which it readily receives from almost every spectator; but not from spectators who have sought in the doctrines of Christianity for their guide, and a counteracting principle to the headstrong and dreadful violence of the passions. When compelled to behold it in real life, it would excite in them the deepest pity, and, as far as they could impart it, aid and direction to seek the only source from whence medicine, to heal this fatal sickness of the soul, could be derived. But do not think that such persons could derive pleasure from wit-

nessing a passion that emanates from Satan himself, heightened by all the charms of poetry, addressed to heated and misguided imaginations, whose very applause testifies the dangerous and insane delight they take in what is absolute poison to their moral feelings.”

“ No, certainly,” said I ; “ I do not suppose that such persons could take any delight in the exhibition of any specimens of taste or feeling : but, fortunately for the preservation of the fine arts, and of civilization, and of all that ennobles the mind and distinguishes us in the scale of intellectual beings, the number of such persons, I hope, is small.”

“ You must pardon me,” he replied, “ for differing with you in opinion—not, indeed, as to the number of such persons—for that must be allowed to be confined indeed ;—but, if it were greater—if it were the majority, we should reap, I think, incalculable advantages from it.”

“ We should escape the representation of Othello,” said I, with more acrimony than his gentlemanlike discussion of the subject, however preposterous I thought the opinions he expressed, deserved.

“ Then we should escape,” he continued, “ the representation of a great deal of fine poetry, I freely admit ; but poetry disgraced by the sentiments it conveys. Now, Miss Melville, once more, and for the last time—for I would not intrude my opinions upon you—anxiously as I cannot but wish ” (and he half sighed, as he added, in a low and hesitating voice)—“ that there should be, upon all subjects, a perfect similarity of thinking between us, still I would not press my opinions upon you—but suffer me, once again, to ask you to meditate a little, when time and opportunity serve, upon the passions and feelings which make up the subject-matter of this particular tragedy of Othello.

Think a little upon jealousy : what is it ? You have told me, ‘ a natural passion, and, as such, an interesting one.’ I answer, that jealousy is made up of those hateful feelings, in the conscious possession of which, we most of us experience the sorrowful effects of our first parents transgression. It is made up of feelings totally and decidedly bad : its origin is intense selfishness and pride. A man loves, according to the common acceptation of the term. The object of his attachment must be wholly devoted to him, in body, soul, and spirit : she must have no thought, no speech, no language for any one besides. With all this unbounded expectation of her devotion to him, there exists no confidence in her merits—no dependence upon her integrity, for, if there did, there could be no suspicious doubt, and, consequently, no jealousy.”

“ But, in speaking of Othello,” said I, “ do you make no allowance for the

manner in which his passions are worked upon by the malice of Iago?"

"Undoubtedly, I do," said he; "and, considering the play as the representation of the passions as they exist in their native brutality, I think it a masterpiece. But what I am contending for is, that it is a representation with which, as Christians, we have nothing to do—with which, as Christians, we can have no sympathy, because, being fictitious, we are called upon to afford no amelioration to the wretched state of the possessors of these demoniac emotions; and which, in short, as exhibiting nothing but a mass of error, however beautifully portrayed, is just as disgusting to the moral vision as the finest painting to the sensible eye, when it represents such objects as are uncongenial to the taste of the spectator."

"I suppose it is natural," said I, rather stiffly, "that you should entertain such sentiments."

“ No —not natural !” and he smiled. “ Naturally, I should have seen nothing but beauty in the writings of Shakespear. But I have studied other writings, my dear Miss Melville ; and my reverence for the precepts they inculcate, and the subdued and sanctified spirit they depict as essential to happiness, either in this world or in the next, is so great, that I would sacrifice to it not only my taste, my passions, my affections—but, if I were called upon to make the offering, I should think my life itself a testimony too small to mark myself as their votary and defender.”

What feelings could possess me—what strange prostration of mind and sentiment, that I resisted the admiration which, in spite of my dissatisfaction with his sentiments, expanded my heart, as I gazed upon this noble being, filled with sacred enthusiasm—till, as he spoke, the tears, which trembled in his eyes, at length escaped, and had trickled down

his cheek, before he seemed conscious of the emotion he was betraying—so absorbed—so totally was he abstracted in the sublimity of his feelings ! But I was too deeply sensible of my immense inferiority to him. I thought that he *must* despise me ; and, after my own peculiar method of jumping to conclusions, and as hastily acting upon them, I took it for granted that he perfectly contemned both me and my opinions ; and persuaded that whatever favourable sentiments he certainly had hitherto entertained of me, were now nipt in the bud, I felt so humiliated, that I resolved upon an immediate retreat, without any further discussion of Othello, which, though from different motives, I was now not far from abominating almost as much as he did. Without, therefore, making any reply to his last observation, or manifesting any part of the deep interest with which it had filled my bosom, I rose to take my leave. Miss Delmond, who had

left the field of argument quite clear for us, now interposed, with an intreaty that I would stay, as I usually did, for the supper-tray.

But I was not to be prevailed upon ; I found it too difficult to resume my ease and good temper, which had, somehow or other, been strangely interrupted by the events of the evening. My unhappy habits of indulgence to feeling, and disregard of the use and value of self-control, made it always impossible for me, when once I had lost it, to regain the government over myself, though it were but for an instant, till I had been some hours in solitude. To solitude, therefore, I determined to return ; and, though dissatisfied and disappointed, and altogether very wretched, I was not, upon the whole, in a humour unpropitious to its influence.

Manvers, as usual, rose to accompany me. Our walk, though short, was so likely, from the circumstances which had

occurred, to be an embarrassing one, at least, in the difference I supposed I should find from the frank and easy communication which, on such occasions, had hitherto passed between us, that I should have been very glad, if possible, to have avoided his escort; but, besides that it was not likely he would have complied with such a wish, had I expressed any, of not taking him away from Miss Delmond at so early an hour, I had not appointed the servant to fetch me till some time after that in which I chose to depart; I had therefore no alternative but to accept his proffered services, or to walk alone—which I could not, with any propriety, propose to do.

“ But, I suppose I shall see *you* again ?” said Miss Delmond to him, when he went away.

“ Not to-night,” he replied, in a grave, and even a melancholy tone. I saw that he was disturbed by what had passed. He had hitherto found pleasure

in my society, and in believing there was a congenial mind between us—and now all was overthrown; every favourable impression done away; and thus was a sincere friend, and well-wisher, sacrificed to my usual impetuosity and want of control over my temper and expressions. Such was the construction I put upon his chagrin, and the manner in which he addressed me, as soon as we had left the house, in some degree authorized such a surmise. “I know it is bad taste,” said he, “(to use the fashionable phraseology), and I am sure it is not good religion, to think too much about one’s-self, and fret over the small rebuffs which here and there our opinions meet with; and, however painful (and very painful it must always be to me, to differ from you in sentiment upon matters of importance), yet I could have borne that; or, at least, I should have suppressed the uneasiness it would have occasioned me; but, in

hearing you express what you have expressed to night, Miss Melville, I suffer more than I can describe; because, I cannot but fear that it argues an indifference upon the most important of all subjects, which it is sad enough to witness in those for whom we feel only the common sentiments of general Christian compassion—but, to behold—even to fancy it in you—” He ceased to add more—it seemed—nay, it was certain, that he could not, and that the agitation of his feelings compelled him to be silent. Much as I had reason to believe he was interested in me, I was not prepared to find how deep an affection I had wounded, and scarcely less affected than himself by the contrition I felt, I stammered out something of apology, both for my opinions and the manner in which I had expressed them.

“Your opinions,” said he, “I could find no fault with, if you were of the great mass who belong to the world. But

that contagion, I thought you had escaped from. I thought—" Again he paused in painful agitation.

" God knows," said I, " that I wish to belong to those who are in the possession of the truth. I have suffered too much, and too long from the delusions of my own heart, not to pant after something real—something stable."

" I know you must desire a better resting place—a surer rock of support," he said, " than the suggestions of fancy—the airy visions of imagination, beautiful as those visions too commonly are—so beautiful," he continued, " that even yet, yes, even yet—" but, again he was silent. Some internal struggle seemed to disturb his whole frame, and communicated to me an agitation, which chained up my words, and embarrassed me with a consciousness of seeming—I know not what—but, I thought, perhaps, unkind—unsympathizing. Yet, in the general deportment of Mr. Manvers,

there was so much dignity, so much elevation above the common feelings and occupations of humanity, that he had inspired me with a degree of awe, which no symptoms of natural tenderness, or emotion, on his part, could entirely subdue. But this indefinable feeling of awe melted into one of a softer character, when he thus followed up the indistinct indications of internal conflict, which his last observations conveyed.

“ Oh that I could prevail upon you,” he said, “ to search with the aid of prayer, into the depths of your own heart—to discover your want—your need of some shelter against its deceit.”

“ I need not take much trouble to detect that,” I replied, with a heavy sigh.

“ You think you know your dangers,” he said ; “ you think you well understand your own peculiar and besetting temptations ; but you may be deceived.”

“ It is fit that I should know my own infirmities of temper and character,” I said, “ for I have been brought to their knowledge by severe discipline and intense suffering.”

“ And, would you not wish to conquer these infirmities !” he said, “ and would you not hail as a friend any one who would rejoice to prove a humble means, in the hands of Providence, of guiding you into the way of peace—that way, which, as yet, perhaps, you have not found ?”

“ Oh, would I not !” I exclaimed, in the ardour of my heart, “ would I not ! Yes ; as the friend of my soul—as my deliverer from a load that lays me in the dust, would I hail that person. For what I suffer,” I continued, with tears that could not—would not be restrained, “ what I suffer from the terrors of my own mind—my restless imagination ; my head-strong will—my strong, and undisciplined affections—oh, what I

suffer is known only to my God and me !”

His reply to this burst of agonized emotion, which, if possible, I would have withheld, consisted in a low and inarticulate ejaculation, and for a little interval he did not address me. When he did, it was in a subdued and altered tone.

“ My dear Miss Melville,” he said, “ permit me to offer you the interest and sympathy of a friend—a Christian friend. I am little versed in the habits of the world and the rules of society ; perhaps I intrude ; perhaps I presume too much in asking to be admitted to a place in your friendship. But, if you knew my heart— ” he paused.

“ I do know it,” I said ; “ and to know it is to value it.”

“ God bless you !” was his only reply. We were just at my uncle’s door ; and, apparently incapable of uttering another word, he departed.

CHAP. XIV.



ISABEL IN CONTINUATION.



Come, then, the colours and the ground prepare !
 Dip in the rainbow, trick her off in air ;
 Chuse a firm cloud, before it fall, and in it
 Catch, 'ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute.

POPE.



AFTER this interview with Mr. Manvers, the most open and unrestrained intercourse took place between us. Without being by any means in love with him, I was pleased with his affection for me ; it was a triumph to believe such a man my captive ; it was something to occupy my imagination : it gave animation to my life. His advice was often invaluable to me ; his talents and his conversation (except when I could not

but think him a little prejudiced in his opinions) exceedingly agreeable to me. In a word, he was a resource which I should have been very—very sorry to have been deprived of.

Our friendship had flowed on in an uninterrupted course of mental pleasure, and as yet he had no farther exercised the authority with which I had allowed it to invest him, than occasionally to point out such of my small errors of thinking and acting as he conceived might be obviated by a little advice.

I was now a constant attendant upon his ministry, which for a time produced on me an effect almost electrifying, so matchless, so perfect was his eloquence. Religion, thus exhibited, was a new thing to me; and I gave myself up to it with a degree of enthusiasm which I did not myself suspect to be enthusiasm, till a new turn was given to my destiny, by a circumstance wholly unexpected. This circumstance had so direct an in-

fluence upon my future life, that I must trace it from its commencement.

It had always been agreed upon, by Miss Russell and I, ever since we had turned our attention to the prospect of being married, that whoever arrived first at the dignity of becoming a wife, should select the other as her bride-maid.

Of course I was reminded, at a very early stage of the affair, of this engagement, and desired to hold myself in readiness to fulfil it; and, as the great event approached, many meetings of necessity took place between me and the bride elect, to consult upon our costume, and talk over other arrangements.

Miss Russell told me she expected to see, as her other bridemaid, a young friend, of whom I had often heard her speak in rapturous terms, as one of the most accomplished of beings, and, in wit, talent, and engaging singularity, "*tout à fait unique.*" Miss Stanley, or Kate Stanley, for that was the appel-

lation by which she was usually distinguished, upon the subject of singularity, most unquestionably justified all that had been said or could be said about her. She had lived all her life in London with her father, who was an eminent solicitor. She had lost her mother in early life ; and her father, satisfied that his daughter dressed well, talked well, graced the head of his table with an air of excellent fashion and taste, and had a manner of her own (*outré* to the last degree, but) supported by extraordinary talents of sprightliness, and considerable beauty, never gave himself the least solicitude about her pursuits, her principles, or her conduct.

Circumstances had led to an acquaintance between Miss Russell and this young lady, with whom, once a year, she spent a month during the London season—a visit which had never yet been returned on the part of Miss Stanley, upon the undisguised reason of her abhorrence

to the country (all places, however large or capital, that were out of London, coming, in her opinion, under that denomination). But, upon this occasion, she waived her scruples—at least, she said she would try and overcome them.—

“ And as you have fixed upon February,” she added, in the letter she wrote to Miss Russell, intimating her intention of accepting her invitation, “ I can come well enough, and it will “ make a pleasant break before the “ London season begins ; for, of all “ times in the year, none is so stupid here “ as the *dawn of winter*. The men all “ prose about the Parliament and the “ King’s Speech, and such heavy matters : nothing is set regularly going. “ They always, at this time, make experiments at the Opera, and at the theatres, with second-rate people ; and, “ in short, contrive all manner of means “ of amusing and diverting the atten-

“ tion of the public from the poverty of
 “ the times—till dear, delightful April
 “ comes in with a flow of fresh things
 “ and fresh people—and one begins to
 “ live !”

Such a strange, unceremonious method of accepting what was intended as a mark of attention, I could not consider as indicative of the much that Miss Russell said was to be admired in Miss Stanley ; and I signified my opinion to her without hesitation.

“ Oh ! it’s Kate’s way,” said she ;
 “ nobody can be offended with her : I am sure you, Isabel, will be delighted with her—that is, if she takes a fancy to you, and if Miss Delmond, and somebody else that I won’t name, do not conspire to set you against her—which I hope they will not ; for really I should take it kind if you will shew her some attention when I am gone : she is to spend the time I am absent, on my bridal excursion, with my mother ; and I do

depend very much upon you for making it pleasant to her—for, you know, it will be dreadfully stupid for her here !”

Mr. Manvers was obliged to take more part in Miss Russell’s wedding than he quite liked. His popularity as a preacher had conferred such distinction upon him, as made the Russells solicitous for his intimate acquaintance ; and, as a great favour, they had united to request he would perform the marriage ceremony between Miss Russell and Mr. Belville. Of course, he had yielded his consent to this request—though I much doubt if their other desire, to see as much of him as possible at this ‘ *interesting time*,’ as Miss Russell phrased it, would have been met with so willing a compliance, had he not occasionally been drawn to the house as my visitor rather than their’s,

It was upon the third afternoon previous to the marriage, that the arrival of Miss Stanley was every moment looked for, with various feelings of curiosity, by

the different individuals assembled at Mr. Russell's: these persons were Mrs. Russell, her daughter, Mr. Belville, Miss Delmond, Mr. Manvers, and myself. At length a post-chaise drew up to the door, and out of it descended, first of all, a gentleman, who puzzled us extremely, especially poor Mrs. Russell, who exclaimed, in the confusion of her feelings:—

“ Dear me, Elizabeth! who has she brought with her? I have got but one spare room. Dear me!—and that other lady—who is she?”

“ Oh! that's her maid,” replied Elizabeth; “ but who the man is, I cannot possibly say. But don't distress yourself; Kate will make it out to the satisfaction of us all, I have no doubt.”

In the mean while this unknown hero, after many profound bows and smiles, having handed Miss Stanley into the house, walked off; and Elizabeth hastened into the hall to greet her friend.

“ Well, my dear, how are ye ?” was the first salutation of the latter ; “ and where’s your man ?” was an inquiry which, perhaps, would not have been so audible, had she known that he was actually within hearing.

Elizabeth’s reply we did not hear ; but Miss Stanley’s answer—“ A few friends ! oh, that’s horrible, after such a journey !” —signified that she had told her the dining-room contained some guests who expected her arrival. Miss Russell now advanced to greet her, and to try and prevail upon her to oblige us with her company, which she seemed to be unwilling to do. At last, she promised to appear amongst us by-and-bye, and we were left to talk about her by ourselves.

Nobody seemed more satisfied with this arrangement than Mr. Belville, whose first impressions respecting Miss Stanley had assumed a character of dissatisfaction, when he heard himself inquired

after by the unceremonious distinction of Elizabeth's "man."

"Well, such manners may be very fashionable," said he; "but, for my part, I don't think they are very agreeable. What do you say, Miss Melville?"

"Why, I really don't know," said I: "Miss Stanley seems rather amusing than otherwise; I am not quite sure that I should not rather like her than not. I am fond of original people; one so seldom meets with any but common-place persons, that it is quite a recreation to find a new character."

I felt a little afraid of the penetrating glance of Mr. Manvers, as I uttered this, partly because I did so as a slight reproof for what I thought too much severity in a remark upon Miss Stanley, which I heard him make to Miss Delmond, as we stood at the window to watch her arrival; and partly because I really did feel a kind of interest in this odd

young lady, whose appearance, from the slight view I had obtained of it, seemed to be engaging, as far as youth and beauty could make it so.

He took no notice of my remark, and nothing more was said upon the subject. Soon after tea, Miss Russell came into the room alone, and summoned Mr. Belville to withdraw with her, for the purpose of being introduced to her friend,—a ceremony to which he seemed exceedingly unwilling to submit, as we could gather from his whispered remarks:—“No occasion! I am sure she won’t like me: you had better bring her in here, and let us all meet together.”

The result of the whole was, that Mr. Belville was prevailed upon to comply, though it could not be said “nothing loth.” In a short time he returned, with the two young ladies—when a general introducing of the newly-arrived stranger went round.

“I hope you had a pleasant journey,”

said Mrs. Russell, who I saw was dying with curiosity to know who had been her companion in it, and what was become of him.

“ I never think much about journies,” she replied ; “ they are always stupid things, unless one has pleasant people about one.”

“ But you had, I hope,” said Mrs. Russell, quite incapable of restraining her curiosity any longer. “ That gentleman, I hope, was very agreeable ?”

“ Oh, very !” she replied ; and again there was a pause.

“ I hope you would not stand upon ceremony—but would have brought any friend of your’s to this house,” said Mrs. Russell, with the hesitating tone of one who is not quite sure that there is no danger of an invitation being accepted.

“ Oh ! certainly,” replied Miss Stanley ; “ but this man I never saw before to-day : so, I think, we managed pretty

well to get as far acquainted as we did.”

“ Never saw him before—and yet travelled from London with him !” was Mrs. Russell’s astonished remark.

“ No, not from London,” she replied, with the utmost *nonchalance*—“ only the last two stages. I found the wretched man waiting for a stage coach, which drove up to the inn quite full, and I heard him express regret—so I thought, as he was an agreeable-looking person, I could not do better than give him a seat in the chaise ; and a very pleasant journey we have had. He is a Captain Somebody-or-other quartered here — Heaven knows who ! for I forget every body’s name. But he talked something about calling upon me to-morrow.”

We all stared at one another, in some doubt what to make of this ; but she paid no attention to us or our looks—but took out her work, and went on

with a vivacity peculiarly her own, and with which, strange as it was, I could not help being in some measure pleased.

She was exceedingly pretty, and though in a morning costume, dressed with an air of excellent taste; an air that indicated at once to my fantastic mind that she was a person of genius. It had always been one of my theories, and in truth so it is now, that genius betrays itself as much in the article of dress as in any external circumstance. You will see expence and even magnificence displayed in the attire of many persons; but there is something wanting to give it a charm. And, on the contrary, you will see apparel that is composed of the cheapest and most common materials, receiving from the tact or talent with which it is put together, and worn, the indescribable grace which genius alone throws over every thing it touches. This was just the case with Miss Stanley, who, in her morning gown of printed

calico, made like nothing that ever I saw before, looked to my taste extremely captivating.

“Well, and what do you do here of an evening?” she said, looking round upon us, as we sat, as it were in speechless wonder to make out what she resembled of human kind. “You seem to have got a nice instrument, Elizabeth,” and she looked at the piano-forte, “Does nobody play, or sing?—Oh, yes; you do, I am sure,” and she turned to me with such a good humoured smile, that I could not be displeased with the easiness of her address.

“Miss Melville is a very superior singer!” said Elizabeth, “and I hope will oblige us—do, Isabel,” she said, perceiving my disinclination to do so.

Involuntarily I looked to Mr. Manvers, who had not spoken a single word since the entrance of Miss Stanley; not only, I thought, from disapprobation of her, (though with such a sentiment I

could not doubt of her having inspired him) ; but also from curiosity to discover if her manners were the result of original or affected *naïveté*.

He seemed to understand my glance as an appeal to him whether or not I should comply with Miss Russell's request, as in fact I intended it ; for I rather supposed he might have preferred that I should give him an opportunity of withdrawing from society that I was aware was sufficiently distasteful to him, by proposing to return home. But he roused himself from his abstraction.

“ Oh, yes ; pray sing ! ” he said ; then with a lower voice, as he approached to assist in opening the instrument, “ and let it be something,” he added, “ to harmonize the mind, and bring it a little within the sphere of sober thinking and feeling.”

“ You are too severe ! ” I whispered ;
 “ you are not even Christian like—you are not charitable ! ”

“ Ah ! Miss Melville,” and he shook his head, “ why are you thus easily seduced by fancy ! Depend upon it every thing is radically wrong here !”

I felt quite angry with him, especially when Miss Stanley, who took little or no notice of any one else, came and seated herself by me, inquiring, as if she felt an interest in it, “ What I was going to oblige them with ?”

“ I deal rather in the old school,” said I, “ which I fear will not exactly accord with the taste of a lady who, no doubt, is quite *au fait* with all the more fashionable music of the day.”

“ For which reason,” she replied, “ I am quite disposed to be delighted with what is old and unfashionable. One is so inundated with rubbish under the title of what is new, that, positively, the sight of a hot-pressed clean white-looking title page to a piece of music, gives me the heart-burn ; more especially if it be ornamented with dancing ladies beating

a tamborine, or sylphs hanging flowers about a harp, or capital letters announcing that it is an air sung with unbounded applause by Mr. Braham, at Drury Lane, or an Italian song with variations, adapted for the piano-forte. Now this," and she took up an old volume of Handel's songs, the leaves of which were turned yellow by age, "this looks respectable; this tells its own story. Dear, delightful old Handel!" she continued, as she opened it, "who, nobody that values a musical reputation, would now dare to praise as he deserves! Oh, do give me something out of this treasury!" she said. "Would you not like to hear her sing a song of Handel's?" and she turned to Mr. Manvers, who, in spite of himself, was obliged to smile at the careless ease with which she made herself acquainted with every body.

He suggested that I should sing, "Ye sacred Priests," from Jephtha, which I did to the best of my ability; for with all

her volatility, there was an air of sense about Miss Stanley that made me conceive her to be an auditor worthy of my best exertions to please ; added to which it was a very favourite song of Mr. Manvers ; and I was always delighted to exercise any talents I possessed to give him pleasure. The meed of approbation he gave me was generally silence, but to me, a silence more eloquent than any words ; for the sigh, the glistening eye, were tokens of delight which elevated while they soothed my heart.

His interest in me while I was performing this song, was always peculiarly deep, and to-night more particularly so. He sat by the side of the piano, with his head bent down upon his clasped hands ; and never once raised it from this attitude till I had concluded : nor did he then address me, but, as if unwilling that the emotion I had excited in him should be witnessed, he walked towards the fire, near which Mr. Belville and Eliza-

beth had been in low and earnest discourse while I was singing ; but who, on his approach, left off talking, and both exclaimed that my performance was charming !

He smiled upon them, but made no reply.

“ Did you ever spend a season in London ? ” was the first remark of Miss Stanley, when I had ended my song.

I replied in the negative.

“ Really ! well that’s astonishing ! and yet, I don’t know,” and she mused a little—“ no ; I don’t think upon the whole it is so astonishing either—I might almost have supposed it from your singing that song so simply, that is so chastely—so devoid of *cadenza* and *volato*, and nobody knows what that is ridiculous ! But you really must come up to town ; you can have no idea what a sensation you would make—Mrs. Melmoth would worship me for introducing such an acquisition to her concerts—you would

bring Handel into fashion—you would make a revolution in taste—I don't know what you might not do. Positively you must think about it ; and that you may do so, don't be long in getting acquainted with me : I shall be here till the beginning of April ; in the course of that time you surely can manage to make out enough of my character to trust yourself with me for a few weeks ?”

I laughed at the strangeness of such an invitation.

“ Oh, I am in real good earnest,” she said ; “ I know every body that I like to know just as well in an hour as in a twelvemonth ; but I am aware that the prejudice is in favour of getting acquainted more gradually ; and as you no doubt favour these prejudices, I would not interrupt them too unceremoniously ; only pray surmount them by the first of April, and try to like me if you can, for I am infinitely disposed to return any measure of re-

gard you may be inclined to manifest for me."

Then addressing the company in general with information that "she was fatigued with her journey, and should have the honour of wishing them good-night," she left the room.

CHAP. XV.

ISABEL IN CONTINUATION.

With respect to a man's character, he had better be guilty of almost any sin than what the world calls too much religion.

ADAMS' PRIVATE THOUGHTS.

At the appointed time, Miss Russell became Mrs. Belville; and after having spent some weeks on a bridal tour, she accompanied her husband to his residence in a distant part of the kingdom. In the mean time Miss Stanley and I entered into a very strong league of amity. She was a specimen of human nature quite new to me, and one, unfortunately, but too agreeable to the natural bent of my disposition. The advanced years of my uncle, and his quiet habits, had occasioned me to live a very retired life, and

consequently confined in a circumscribed sphere those talents for observation which I felt that I possessed, and which, in the absence of any other exciting cause, never failed to stimulate the activity and restlessness of my spirit, and prompt a wish to seek materials for it to work upon. The books I had most delight in, were all of a kind to promote the predominant bias of my disposition. The study of character was certainly the only study on which I ever expended either time or trouble. Hence, I had devoured with insatiable eagerness works of biography, private memoirs, more particularly those of modern date, for the obvious reason that the nearer a history was brought to my own time, the more certainly it exhibited those slight shades of character which take their tint from the passing customs of the day; and which, at this time of my life, better suited the volatility of my pursuits than those elevated and general views of hu-

man nature, which are commonly the study of a more advanced period of existence. I was gifted with a quick and strong sense of the ridiculous ; and where this is the case, time (in the absence of a better principle) is, I believe, the only effectual restraint upon the satire which such a disposition too surely fosters and promotes.

I thought that I had this better principle ; but the growing delight I experienced in the society of Miss Stanley would have painfully convinced me that I had not, if the monitions of conscience had not been repressed whenever they threatened to be troublesome, by the ready deceitfulness of my heart.

“ How very agreeable she is,” I said to myself one evening, after she had been amusing both my uncle and myself by her sprightly descriptions, and, to me, perfectly original remarks. The pleasure she afforded me was not diminished, when my good uncle observed, as soon as she was gone,

“ Indeed, Isabel, I think you may as well accept Miss Stanley’s invitation ; it will do you good, my dear, for you live but a dull sort of life here.”

One great barrier to my acceding to her wishes, was thus at once removed ; for I had hesitated, principally, in accepting her invitation, because I thought he would think our acquaintance too slight to warrant such a measure.

I thanked him very sincerely for his kindness ; but I did not decidedly say whether I wished to avail myself of it ; for there existed yet, though a subordinate obstacle, still there was an obstacle to my entering into such a project with the complete internal satisfaction which could alone have promised to render it perfectly agreeable. This was the certain disapprobation of Mr. Manvers and Miss Delmond. Ever since I had allied myself in bonds of intimacy with Miss Stanley, I had perceived, or fancied that I did, a change in the manner, of both

the aunt and nephew. In him it was more evident than in her ; for the invariable placidity and accommodating kindness of her temper, rendered her as incapable of testifying unpleasant feelings as she was of encouraging them. It was only because I felt that I was inconsistent and unstable, that I expected to experience her reproof ; and as I well knew I deserved it, I supposed that I tacitly had it, though, beyond supposition, I had no ground for believing her dissatisfied with me. She openly professed to me, indeed, strong disapprobation of Miss Stanley ; nor could any plausible representations, on my part, as to the neglected education she had experienced upon the points Miss Delmond considered most essential, at all propitiate, what I called the severity of her criticisms upon my new friend.

“ I have but one standard for judging of good qualities, Isabel,” she would say, in reply to all I could advance touching

the fascinations of Miss Stanley—"is she a Christian?"

I could not answer the question satisfactorily ; but I could not be silent, because that would have been to have given up my friend. I generally, therefore, evaded it by launching out into severe invectives upon the rigidness of party spirit, and the uncharitableness of judging others ; at which the good creature used to smile—as she did, indeed, at most of the ebullitions of anger into which my attachment to Kate Stanley usually betrayed me, whenever I heard her, as I thought, unjustly condemned.

Such was nearly the amount of Miss Delmond's dissatisfaction with me, though the gradual neglect of her, which sprung from association with a character so opposite to her's as Miss Stanley, would have justified a much more pointed display of it.

But Mr. Manvers was not so acquiescent in my proceedings : he never

forced his opinions upon me as to the propriety of my friendship with Miss Stanley ; neither did he obtrude any of his sentiments respecting her upon my consideration. But, in his very silence, I detected the settled aversion he experienced against every part of her character ; and, in the gradual decline of the strong interest he had once professed and always manifested towards every thing that concerned me, I traced, with more regret than I cared to admit, the total loss of his friendship and regard.

The time for Miss Stanley's return to London was now so rapidly approaching, that it became quite necessary for me to decide whether or not I intended to accompany her. But, much as I desired to do so, a strange and indefinable feeling of unwillingness restrained me from yielding to my wishes. I thought there was an instability of purpose in indulging them, which made me seem to myself almost as inconsistent as I well

knew I should appear to Miss Delmond and Mr. Manvers. I had never been resident in London, and knew nothing of its general customs and tone of society; but I knew enough, from what I had observed in Miss Stanley, to draw a pretty just estimate of the circle in which she moved; and well could I imagine, that serious thoughts and religious feelings could nowhere find a more uncongenial atmosphere than that in which she lived; and these thoughts and these feelings were dear and sacred to me. Wayward and capricious, and inconsistent, and unstable, and full of error as I was, there never was a period since I became capable of thought and reflection, in which I could have been content to pass day after day, and week after week, and month after month, without any interval of deep consideration for the interests of that immortal soul which God had given me, and for the care of which I must one day stand

responsible before his awful throne! No!—blessed be his name for the unspeakable advantage!—never had I yet held daily and intimate communion with those who were practically living “without Him in the world;” and deeply and sorrowfully did I experience a conviction that I never could associate with such persons without feelings of internal reproach, which no sophistry could eradicate, however it might afford a temporary relief from their suggestions.

“But, perhaps,” I thought, “Miss Stanley in her heart may have some feelings of sincere devotion. Who can tell what passes in the mind of another? I am doing the very thing I condemn so much in most of the religious persons I have known—that of setting it down as an established fact, that where an open and avowed profession of religious principle is not made, there is none existing.”

But in vain I endeavoured to delude

myself with such reasoning as this ; for well I knew that it was perfectly impossible that any real believer in Christianity could so totally set at nought many of its plainest precepts, with the most apparent unconsciousness of any violation of its duties—as Miss Stanley did every day of her life. I fell upon another suggestion to exculpate her, or, I believe, I should more justly say, to exonerate myself from blame, in following my own will.

“ Perhaps,” said I, “ she never has met with any person who thought more upon these subjects than she does herself: if she had, she might have been a very different character. I should like to hear what she has to say upon these points ;” and I resolved, when we met on the following day, to lead the conversation in that direction.

I expected to have found some difficulty in doing this ; for, upon no occasion since we became acquainted, had I

heard from her any remark which indicated the slightest interest or concern about spiritual things; and, if it were safe or proper to judge from what appeared, it would not have been uncharitable to infer, that it was a matter of indifference to her whether she had a soul to be saved or not.

But, at the present moment, I was unusually disposed to be tender and cautious in my judgment, and to seize with rapture upon the least indication of the sentiments I wished to discover in her.

It was not, however, with extraordinary satisfaction that, as we were taking a walk together the next morning, I heard her reply to vague and faint objections on my side towards accompanying her to town:—

“ I know very well, Isabel, what all this reluctance proceeds from ;—you are afraid of having your morals contaminated amongst us. Yes, yes ! though I have been silent, I have not been unob-

serving ; I have seen all along how it is with you ; and it is this, I candidly confess, amongst other causes, which has made me so anxious to rescue you from the hands of ——. But—” (and she suddenly checked herself)—“ one should never name names. Suffice it to say, that I am convinced, if you stay here, you are a lost creature to all intents and purposes.”

“ A lost creature !” I repeated, with much surprise.

“ Ruined—destroyed for every purpose in life !” she replied.

“ What can you mean ?” I asked.

“ Simply this, my dear Isabel :—you will get entangled into becoming a member of a low, narrow-minded party, who arrogate to themselves the title of religious people—but whose chief pretensions to such a distinction consist in a voluntary separation from the society which their deficiency of taste and ta-

lent, and accomplishments and rank, naturally exclude them from, and which the bad passions of their nature, and not the doctrines of religion, induce them to vilify and condemn.”

I paused before I replied to this. Unhappily, I knew some instances of professing Christians who too well justified the truth of her remark; but I knew many more, whose whole life and conduct gave the lie to it; I knew many who were walking in a daily round of well-performed duties—in a calm and silent abstraction from the giddy round of senseless pleasures which absorbed the world at large; and, at the same time, testifying for that world a sympathizing pity, and a prompt desire to win from its abyss of ruin every human creature that had the slightest perception of its danger.

Such persons I knew; but my treacherous heart, in league with its bitter-

est enemy, too easily inclined a willing ear to the representations which Miss Stanley continued to exhibit.

“ I know them !” she proceeded—“ I know them well ! I know that their very name is synonymous with all that is treacherous ; and the very first question I put to any female domestic who offers herself to my service, is, ‘ Do you attend any particular preacher, or call yourself a serious character ?’ and, if she replies in the affirmative, my direct answer is, ‘ Then, I have nothing more to say to you : I wish you good morning !’ ”

Much as I wished to think well of her, there was something rather too preposterous in such an acknowledgment to be passed over without comment.

“ Surely,” said I, “ that method of proceeding is not altogether just, either to yourself, or to the person whose services you so reject. It is not only branding her with implied obloquy, but it is by an inference too plain to be pas-

sed by, or in any way got over, stigmatising yourself as a disbeliever in the religion you nominally profess. For, if you studied, and understood, and believed it, you could not possibly imagine that any person whatever could be the worse character for professing a concern and interest in it; neither would you, prior to proof, anticipate a certainty of being injured by any connection you might chance to hold with such a character."

"It was not prior to proof, Isabel," she replied, "that I adopted such opinions. I have known in my own instance, and in many instances amongst my friends, that whenever fraud or depredation of any kind has been committed in a family, if any one member of it was, more than another, what is called a serious character, that person was invariably the most concerned in it."

"I do not think," said I, "that such instances of deceit at all affect the

great, and general question, whether there be such a thing as true religion or not ?”

“ And who ever made it a question ?” she asked with some surprise ; “ I am sure, I never did.”

“ Did you not ?” I replied. But seeing in the expression of her face, what I fancied a slight shade of displeasure, “ oh no,” I continued, “ I certainly never heard you express any doubts, or indeed, allude to the subject at all till this morning. Then, perhaps, from what you have just said, I might too hastily infer that— ”

“ Yes, Isabel,” and she interrupted me, “ that is the fault of all you good people.”

“ Me amongst the good people !” and I smiled, though I heaved a deep sigh at the same moment. “ God help me ! I know but little, and practise less than the meanest amongst those you so designate.”

“ You are very well, and quite good enough for the world you live in,” she said, “ if you do not take pains to make yourself disagreeable, by sacrificing your talents and your taste at the shrine of human opinion ; and turning yourself into a sour, morose ascetic, languishing after the world you have unnaturally detached yourself from, and by way of compensation for your loss, abusing every body that acts the part in it that was assigned to them ; and pretending to support your opinions with texts from Scripture, that have no more to do with the state of things at present, than the Jewish laws have. This will be your case, my poor dear Isabel ; and when you have abandoned your music as an abomination, and your talents as a snare, and pleasant, clever people, as belonging body and soul to the evil one, you will be what they call a converted character.”

I knew that this was an exaggerated

caricature, but I could not refrain from laughing at it, neither could I repress a strong inclination to acquiesce in it, far more than, as a reasonable being, I ought to have done ; for, independently of any religious considerations, I could not but see the manifest injustice of her remarks, as applied to me, who, in the possession of Miss Delmond's friendship, had always a strong counteraction to any tendency towards the contracted views and narrow prejudices which Miss Stanley apprehended I should acquire.

No one could have a greater delight in witnessing the exercise of my talents than Miss Delmond ; no one more sedulous to encourage and promote innocent cheerfulness ; and though herself withdrawn from the world, no one more compassionate to its errors, more gentle in her judgment of it, or more anxious to avail herself of every occasion in which she could, consistently with her principles, participate in its pursuits.

But I had an inclination to please, and will to gratify, and it suited with the indulgence of both that I should think Miss Stanley right. Nevertheless, though with some doubt as to my hearing any thing very satisfactory, I went on to urge her into a more definite display of her own opinions upon the subject, than appeared in these general and overstrained remarks.

“No doubt,” I said, “there was a great deal of error in all human opinions, and corruption crept in, and, more or less, defiled the holiest things. Still, my dear Kate,” I continued, “this error and this corruption ought not, and does not, in any liberal mind, lead to the conclusions which must inevitably be drawn from your statement; that there is no such thing as leading a retired and sanctified life from a sense of duty, without deserving to be stigmatized as disagreeable and unsocial, and filled with rancorous and malignant pas-

sions. Can you not believe that a mind deeply impressed with a sense of its accountableness, and anxious to discover the path of duty, may, upon principles of reason, as well as religion, withdraw from general society, if the habits of society are felt by such a mind to be inconsistent with the subdued and holy temper, the acquirement of which is its principal aim?" She was silent a little while; at length, "I do not, I believe quite understand you," she said. "If by a subdued and holy temper, you mean a perpetual dwelling upon sacred subjects, an absence of all recreation, and a distaste to every thing which has no connection with eternity, I reply, that such a temper is practically unattainable. It never was meant for us to attempt the acquisition of it."

Our blessed Saviour's command, "*Be ye perfect, as your father which is in heaven is perfect,*" here flashed upon my

recollection ; but something restrained me from uttering it, and she went on.

“ In short, my own opinion is briefly this. We are sent into this world with various passions and feelings, which obviously require control—education supplies the proper check.”

“ *Religious* education supplies it,” I observed.

“ Of course,” she replied. “ When I spoke of education, I took it for granted that it comprized religious instruction. These passions and feelings, properly governed, form the means of our happiness. They suggest and supply a thousand innocent sources of pleasure, which no mind in a sane and healthy state, would affect to condemn—I certainly do not : on the contrary, I consider them as the gift of Providence, and as such I receive and use them.”

I had never heard Miss Stanley so serious, or so reasonable. I was per-

fectly charmed with her. I saw no danger in surrendering myself up to the society of a person, who, to her various fascinations united so judicious and sensible a mind, as, upon occasion, I found she could display.

I forgot, in the warmth of my approbation, that the plausible opinions she professed, had nothing whatever to do with the subject upon which I wished to obtain information, *viz.* her religious sentiments.

Those she had just professed were such as might have been entertained in the days of Socrates, and gave no testimony whatever to her being at all under the influence of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. But this was a point I was willing, as she said upon the subject of education, "*to take for granted.*" Miss Edgeworth, I think it is, that remarks, "Half the mistakes of life arise from taking things for granted."

The result was, that I parted from her with my mind nearly resolved to accede to her invitation, and with a promise on the morrow to give her my final decision.

CHAP. XVI.

ISABEL IN CONTINUATION.

Thus men go wrong with an ingenious skill,
 Bend the straight rule to their own crooked will ;
 And with a clear and shining lamp supplied,
 First put it out, then take it for a guide.
 Halting on crutches of unequal size,
 One leg by truth supported, one by lies ;
 They sidle to the goal with awkward pace,
 Secure of nothing—but to lose the race.

COWPER.

AFTER ruminating for two or three hours upon the evidence I thought Miss Stanley had displayed of a reasonable mind, I arrived at the determination of going to London ; and on signifying it, after dinner, to my uncle, I found from him a ready and affectionate approval of my intentions. It remained now to announce my purpose to my friend Miss

Delmond, through whom I left it to find its way to Mr. Manvers as it might, very glad to escape the unbending distaste, with which I was well persuaded he would listen to it.

As soon as I had drank tea I set off for the cottage of my friend, who, I found upon my arrival, was gone out upon an afternoon visit. I was just quitting the door on my return home, when Mr. Manvers approached.

“Miss Delmond is not at home,” said I, “so we have both had our walk for nothing.”

“I am sure I shall not consider that I have taken mine for nothing,” he replied, with more pleasure in his address to me than I had for some time observed, “if you will permit me to escort you home—or any where else that you may be inclined to bend your course to;” and he offered his arm : which I took, though with hesitation, and unwillingness ; for I knew that our con-

tinuing long together would infallibly lead to my betraying the thoughts and designs of my heart, which it was greatly my desire he should be informed of by any person rather than by me. However, I considered that if I did speak of them, it ought to be, in point of fact, a matter of perfect indifference to me whether Mr. Manvers approved of them or not. He was invested with no authority to take cognizance of my actions ; and in thus shrinking from his opinion, I condemned myself as acting a cowardly and ignoble part.

Common-place remarks never formed any part of his conversation ; I had consequently no dependance upon a protracted theme respecting the weather, for keeping us in discourse till I arrived at my uncle's door. Long before I came in sight of it, he had, in spite of my disdain for what might be his sentiments, suffused my cheeks with blushes, by turning to me with all the

wanted interest and affection to which I had lately been a stranger, and remarking. “ On Saturday next, (I have just heard from the Russells), Miss Stanley quits D —, and I cannot profess to regret it for many reasons ; but one, perhaps, I may name, which is, that once more we shall, I hope, have you *restored* to us ;” and he laid much emphasis upon the word restored.

“ I am sorry to blight any of your pleasing anticipations,” I replied ; with a faint smile, “ but I doubt— ”

“ Do you—” he interrupted me hastily, but repressing the emotion with which he was about to make the inquiry, “ do you, then, intend to accompany her ?” he calmly said.

“ I think it probable,” I replied ; and I should have been glad to have paid a proper tribute to the friendship he had offered me, by asking his opinion of such a measure ; but, unless I intended to follow it, I saw nothing but mockery

in applying for it. I preferred to palliate the imprudence he would attribute to me, by exhibiting to him the character of Miss Stanley in the new and advantageous light it had that morning appeared to me.

“ I am persuaded,” said I, “ that you do not understand Miss Stanley. You do not perceive the excellent understanding she disguises, under the apparent frivolity of her general discourse.”

I waited for some encouraging reply ; but in vain—he was silent ; and with increased animation I went on, not the less warm in my friend’s behalf from feeling a little provoked that I could extract no symptom of encouragement on his side to the defence I set up for her. “ But I think Mr. Manvers,” said I, “ *your* principles should exempt you from forming such harsh, and, I must call them, unjust judgments. You must well remember where, and by whom,

we are commanded to ‘judge not.’” Still he was silent ; and, but that a deep sigh, and a look of the most painful melancholy, evinced him to be under the influence of emotions which I had suddenly excited, I could have supposed that he was not attending to a single word I uttered.

“ Fortunately, however,” I continued, as I ascended the steps of my uncle’s dwelling, “ to prevent me from saying more than I ought to say, I am now to release you from any further attendance ;” and I would have withdrawn my arm : but he still retained it.

“ A little longer—” he said ; “ forgive the seeming liberty of such a request ; but if you would receive them with patience, I could wish to say a few words to you. Might I prevail upon you to extend your walk—the evening is fine—and there is yet an hour of daylight ?”

I felt it impossible to refuse ; indeed, I was most unwilling that he should

leave me, with so much visible dissatisfaction on my side, unexplained.

Much to my surprise, as we resumed our walk, he was still silent; but not, I felt assured, from any deficiency of words. These seemed to be restrained with a visible effort—a painful one. The feelings of his heart appeared to be every moment bursting from his lips; but checked—thrown back upon themselves, they were attempted to be dissipated in sighs so deep and heavy, that it moved my heart to hear them. “I have given you pain!” I could not refrain from saying.

“Think not of me,” he said; “it is for you I suffer, Isabel.”

“For me!”

“Yes, for you—I suffer to see you rushing into temptations which, I fear, will be too strong for you. Oh, that I—but—” He pressed his hand for a little interval to his forehead, and when he removed it, a more tranquil expression

sat upon his features, and he spoke more calmly. "You cannot wonder that I anticipate danger for you, in a residence of some weeks in the circle of society, it may be concluded Miss Stanley frequents."

"Indeed," said I, "you are too severe; you can know nothing, excuse me, of the society Miss Stanley frequents, and why should you stigmatize it as dangerous?"

"For the simple reason, that I consider all persons who are living without religion, as forming a society that cannot be otherwise than dangerous."

"But I am not aware that you know any thing of these persons?"

"You drive me very hard" and he smiled; "but, suffer me to ask you, what your opinions are of the society to which, judging, by Miss Stanley's pursuits, and sentiments, and general habits, you expect she would introduce you?"

“ I cannot judge,” I replied, “ of that of which I know nothing.”

“ Oh, Isabel !” and he shook his head.

“ You think that I am evading your question,” I said.

“ Can I think otherwise ?” he replied. “ But I will waive an inquiry which you do not appear disposed to answer, and will cheerfully consent to acknowledge myself hasty, and even wrong in my sentiments, respecting what I suppose to be the character of Miss Stanley’s acquaintance, if you will relate to me any instance of religious principle in her opinions or her conduct, since you became acquainted with her, which induces you to think that she has hours of reflection, and may, therefore, number amongst her associates persons who would be likely to encourage them.”

“ I can certainly recur to a conversation, which occurred no further back than this very morning,” said I, “ to

adduce an instance of her expressing opinions far more serious than I gave her credit for possessing : opinions which, in my judgment, proved her not only to be an observer upon human life, but one who drew moral conclusions from her observations. ;” and I repeated, with much satisfaction, all the wise things she had said.

“ All this,” said he, “ is very sensible, no doubt ; but it has nothing to do with my argument. I can well suppose that Miss Stanley possesses, like most persons of any understanding (and, in fact, one might concede it to any person whose mind was at all removed from imbecility), the faculty of discovering that we come into the world with various passions and feelings which require control, and that education will supply this control. These are facts which were perceived and acted upon long before we were blessed with the light of revelation. I doubt I must urge you

for some more definite testimony than this of Miss Stanley's serious views."

"I cannot—I do not pretend to exhibit Miss Stanley as a religious character, in your view of the subject," I replied.

"There is but one view, Isabel!" he said.

"Excuse me," said I—"there are as many different views of this great subject, as there are different sects professing it."

"Their views differ upon minor points," he replied; "but I know of no denomination of professing Christians who do not make the name of the blessed Founder of their religion the only name by which they seek or hope to find salvation. Did you ever hear this name from the lips of Miss Stanley? Did you ever hear her allude to it as her refuge—her rock of support? Did you ever hear her utter a supposition, that she possesses any interest in it? Tell me that you

have, and I will withdraw all that I have said of her that is severe or harsh ; and I will allow that, though I have never seen any evidence of it, she may in her heart be a real believer in the truth of Christianity.”

“ I cannot, perhaps,” I replied, after a short pause—“ I cannot specify any instance of the kind you desire to hear ; but I still think it would be uncharitable to brand her with the name of an unbeliever, because she does not openly say all that may, nevertheless, pass within her thoughts upon these points. We cannot tell what is going on in the heart of any one.”

“ Certainly, we cannot,” he replied ; “ and, if I know myself, no person would more unwillingly step out of the way to pass unnecessary opinions upon another. But the friendship you have permitted me to form with you has induced me, perhaps too intrusively, to suggest to your thoughts the consideration of what

you are about to do, by associating yourself in a continued league of, what I must apprehend to be, a dangerous intimacy, because it necessarily leads to consequences even yet more alarming."

"I cannot see it in this light," said I, impatiently; "I cannot see the use of opposing every promised pleasure, in the apprehension of its proving a snare. I am sure this is not to make that use of the gifts of Providence which his benevolent goodness has assigned to them."

"Far from advising such a course of conduct," he gravely replied, "I should reprove it as a sin. It is not the use of those blessings which a bountiful Providence has scattered in abundance around us that I deprecate:—no, Miss Melville, I rejoice in the use of them; and, while I bless the hand which bestows them, I pray for their continuance. Do you think," he continued, as he looked around him with a smile—"do you think that I am insensible to such a

scene as this?—this smiling landscape—this soft evening sun—those sweet warbling birds—these tranquil creatures, cropping their food from the rich earth that teems with its great Master's bounty—and the friend that walks beside me, whose immortal soul I trust to hold communion with beyond the grave!—What! do you think I have no heart for this? Oh, Isabel! you know me not—you know me not!”

His energy affected me, and it was with difficulty I repressed my rising tears.

“ I know you so well,” I replied, as soon as I could speak without faltering,—“ so well do I know the delicacy of your taste and the tenderness of your heart, that I cannot conceive, nor know I how to endure, the severity which separates you so completely and so austere from the general pursuits and interests of life.”

“ It is because I have another pur-

suit—another interest!” he replied; “and ‘where my treasure is, there will be my heart.’ Believe me, Isabel—you may, indeed, believe me—it is no severe or unaccommodating principle of a mere worldly kind that actuates my conduct: it is the result of conviction. I am convinced that it is impossible to be the friend of the world without, at the same time, becoming the enemy of God. I have the warrant of Scripture for this conviction, and, added to that, I have the testimony of experience. The atmosphere of the world is poisonous and deadly to the immortal interests of the soul.”

“Who, then, can be saved?” I asked, unconscious at the moment that I was adopting a question which, in the first dawn of the Christian religion, had been put to its blessed Founder.

“Do you not remember the reply, which was returned by the only infallible Authority to that question?” he said:

‘ Strive to enter in at the strait gate ;
 ‘ for many, I say unto you, will seek to
 ‘ enter in, and shall not be able ;’* and
 not once only have we this memorable
 command, but, among the very first pre-
 cepts of our divine Teacher, we have
 nearly the same words—only with this
 fearful distinction : ‘ Enter ye in at the
 ‘ strait gate ; for wide is the gate and
 ‘ broad is the way that leadeth to de-
 ‘ struction, and many there be which go
 ‘ in thereat ; because strait is the gate
 ‘ and narrow is the way which leadeth
 ‘ unto life, and few there be that find
 ‘ it.’† Now, Isabel, the world is either
 right or wrong. I will consent to judge
 it by this single text of Scripture. We
 will take it for granted that most indi-
 viduals to whom you would propose the
 question, ‘ Are you in hopes of obtaining
 eternal life after death ?’ would answer
 in the affirmative. Would it deserve to

* Luke xiii. 24.

† Matt. vii. 13, 14.

be called severe or unreasonable that you should then reply, ‘ You are no doubt then, in obedience to your Saviour’s command, striving to enter in at the strait gate ; that is, you are daily fighting against evil tempers, evil passions, and all the various corruptions of your nature ; and, according to the conditions by which you were made a Christian by baptism, and the vows then taken for you by your sureties, and confirmed by yourself when you came to riper years, you are not ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but are resolved manfully to fight under his banner, and to continue his faithful soldier and servant unto your life’s end.’ What think you would be their answer to such queries as these ?”

I dared not say what I verily believed would have been replied—at least, I am sure I must have said it myself, if I had answered truly to such questions—‘ that I scarcely knew what had been promised

for me in my baptism, or what vows then taken I had ratified by the act of confirmation; that I had thought little or nothing about it, considering it as a mere form, that it was right and customary to submit to.' I dared not say this; for I shrunk from the just disapprobation—the proper contempt—with which he must have heard one, who professed to have more than a nominal faith, acknowledge herself so wilfully ignorant of the first principles of religion—those very principles she had vowed to adopt. I only said, therefore,—

“They would probably reply, I do my best, that is, I do as much good and as little evil as I possibly can. I resist my wrong propensities, and encourage those which are right; and having done this, I conceive I am quite justified in taking any and all the innocent pleasures that fall in my way.”

“Very well,” he replied, “I should answer to such persons, this is all very

good : but it is too general. It may mean any thing or nothing—I want a test of your being right—I resort then to the text, ‘Strive to enter in at the strait gate.’ The very word ‘*strive*’ (and the original word, ‘*agonize*’ is far more forcible) conveys an idea of struggle against an opposite and very strong principle. No doubt, then, in resisting these wrong propensities, and cultivating good ones, you experience a severe conflict—you are incessantly discovering that you are called upon to ‘*strive*’—that the way you are entering upon is, as you are told, a narrow and difficult way, and that but few persons have courage to walk in it. So intense must sometimes be your struggles, that, no doubt, you are ready to turn back and join the multitude who are travelling in a broad and beaten, and, according to mere appearances, a far more agreeable way. Then what is your resource and consolation? To whom do you carry your heavy laden

spirit? and where do you seek rest for your soul? Answer me these questions, not with general observations, but in individual and definite terms. Now, Isabel, what have you to say to me?"

I smiled—"I can say for myself," I replied, "that I do very often find a severe struggle to undergo—a painful sacrifice to make, and never have I received any support in such a conflict, but in asking the aid of my Heavenly Father, through the intercession of Him who is all compassion, and who felt and was touched with a sense of the infirmities of poor human creatures! This I can say for myself—I hope and believe I might say it for many more besides."

"I believe you," he replied, "as far as relates to yourself I can believe you. It is the conviction that you live in the exercise of prayer, which affords me a sanguine hope that you will ultimately escape from the dangers that threaten you. Prayer is the first evidence of an

awakened soul. ‘Behold he prayeth!’* was the testimony which our divine Master himself gave of the Apostle of the Gentiles in the first days of his conversion. But suffer me to call your attention yet more to the particular and very strong text I have selected, as one among many by which to try the right and wrong opinion of the world at large upon the great question of religion. It is in vain to make any general appeal, because, it is not unreasonable or uncharitable to say, that, but comparatively few persons are believers in the truth of Christianity. They call themselves such; and as it forms a part of the law of the land, they are obliged, to a certain extent, to conform to its restrictions; but any knowledge of its peculiar and vital doctrines, any habitual and predominant adoption of them as daily practical influencing principles, considered and

* Acts IX. 11.

acted upon as the first and most important of principles, it is manifestly preposterous to assert as being the case of the greater part, or of any other than a very small part of the civilized world. Mind, I do not mean to assert that there is not a great deal of morality and amiable conduct in the world—what I contend for is that *Christianity* is little known and acted upon; and, except that Sunday would then have been as another day, most persons would have lived the same lives, and have been just as amiable and just as happy as they are now, if there had never been any revelation at all. A great number who are virtuous and amiable now, might have practised the same conduct upon the same principles if they had never heard the name of the Saviour. This, I think, is a fact which must readily be conceded to me; am I, therefore, uncharitable in asserting, that but few are living in the knowledge and exercise of the christian faith?"

He seemed to expect some answer from me ; but, as I knew not well what to say to him, I only begged of him “ to inform me what he was going further to say upon the passage of Scripture he had already alluded to.”

“ I was about to remark to you,” he replied, “ that we may safely put the whole question upon this issue. In doing so I must make an inference which may seem in the highest degree irreverent. But how are the thoughtless, even amongst those who profess themselves to be his followers—how are they, by their conduct, proclaiming that they think the Saviour of the whole human race was mistaken in his judgment, when he pronounced that, ‘ Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it ;’ and that, ‘ Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto destruction, and *many* there be who go in thereat.’ Now do they find the gate straight and the way

narrow which leads to the eternal life they all profess to be seeking? On the contrary, do they not find it wide and easy of access? Do they not join the *many* rather than the *few*? Do you hear them talk of toil, and conflict, and warfare? Do you ever hear them speak with solicitude about the road they are travelling, as if they had any doubt about its being the right one; though they find it in all its circumstances directly opposed to that which God himself has represented it to be, and tallying in every particular with what he has commanded them to shun? According to them, religion is the easiest thing in the world. ‘Give such a time to such a duty, and such a time to another, and the matter is disposed of; and we may turn again to that dear world where all our affections are centred, and where our proper business lies.’ Is this not the inference to be fairly drawn from what you see?”

I sighed deeply. “Would to God

that it were otherwise !” I said ; “ but I fear it is all too true—yet, Mr. Manvers, I am persuaded, by my own instance, that many, very many, whom you include in this general censure, would gladly seek a better way if they knew where it was”—I stopped, for I *felt*, before I *heard*, what would be his answer.

“ If they knew where it was to be found !” he repeated ; “ What ! with the Bible in their hands, and, blessed be God ! with the Gospel sounding in their ears, if not in every church throughout the land, yet in too many to permit them any such plea as you would offer for them !”

“ I recall such a plea,” said I ; “ I perceive its futility—still, there are many, and I am amongst the number, who pine after the knowledge of the truth, but who yet linger from embracing it, incumbered with a useless load of mere human opinions.”

“ Is that indeed their only motive for

withholding their consent to it?" he asked; "or, to be more candid, is it *your* sole reason, Isabel?"

"I think so," I replied.

"Then discard the incumbrance of human opinion entirely," he replied; "I strongly advise you to do this—take the Bible, and the Bible only, for your guide—put upon its precepts just the simple construction which, in any reasonable judgment, they must bear. I will consent that you shall walk by their guidance—I will joyfully consent to it; and then I know that I shall never have to apprehend, and perhaps to mourn, the consequences of your intimate association with those who are living without God in the world. You will be ready to say with the psalmist:—‘Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he

exercise himself day and night.' Then will you also joyfully say with him, 'I have been a companion of all them who fear Thee.' "

I was deeply struck with his remarks—they agitated and impressed me to a degree of anguish. I felt at one moment as if it would be impossible to pursue my intention of accompanying Miss Stanley—at the next, eager to rush upon the instant prosecution of it, to have the affair over, and to get rid at once of the torturing indecision of my feelings.

"I wish I could do right!" at last I said; "God knows, I would not wilfully rush into error!"

"I will give you a test," he replied, "by which you may almost infallibly judge whether or not you are going to act right or wrong. Try the proposed action by the test of prayer. You tell me that you design to make a visit to Miss Stanley: see if you can ask the blessing of God upon such an intention; see if you can, in His sacred presence, express a

pure and simple desire that it may be attended with a mutual blessing to your souls, by inducing, on the part of both, occasional discourse calculated to promote your religious advancement, as well as by occupying your time in a round of useful and edifying employments."

"You must remember," I said, "that I go expressly for the purpose of a little change of scene, and recreation of spirits. It would not be consistent with my views to transform such a visit into a season of rigid mental exercise and discipline."

"Upon any visit, the purposes you profess are of course implied," said he; "but, consistently with such purposes, I should augur very ill of any intentions that could not implore upon them the blessing of Heaven: I only ask you to bring your's to that test. And now," he continued, perceiving me again at my own door, "I have to thank you for the patient attention you have granted me."

“ I should thank you,” I replied, as I offered him my hand.

“ May God direct you!” was his farewell ; and we parted.

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